

JANUARY 1998



# InterZone

127

£3.00

**Special all-star  
Christmas issue**

Seasonal stories by  
**Pat Cadigan**  
**Colin Greenland**  
**Gwyneth Jones**  
**Graham Joyce**  
**Geoff Ryman**

An interview with  
**Pat Cadigan**

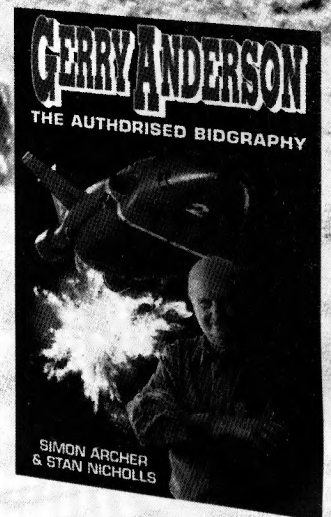
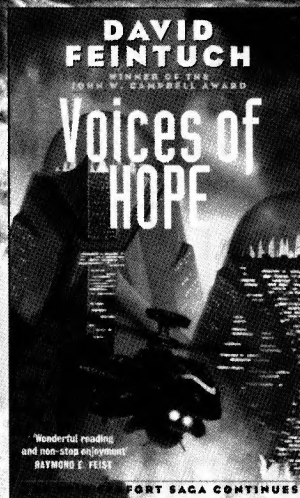
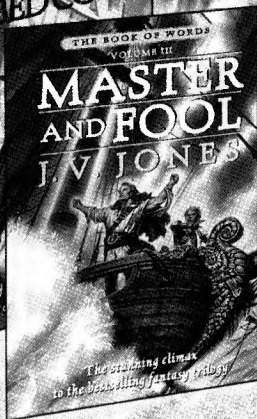
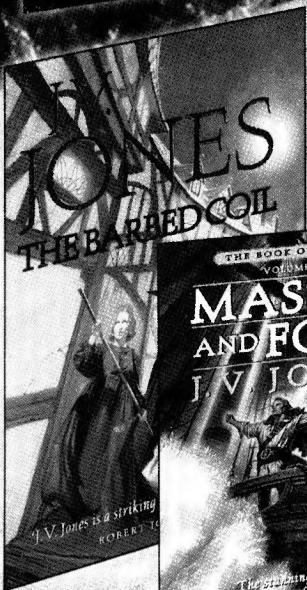
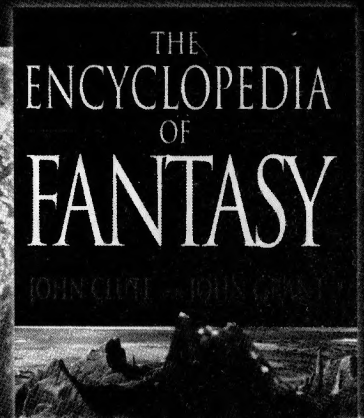
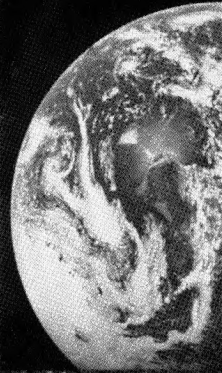
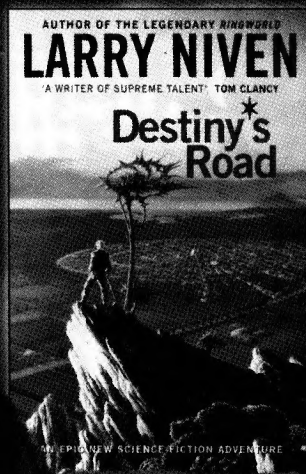
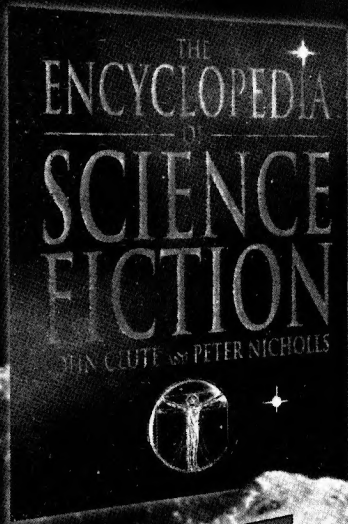
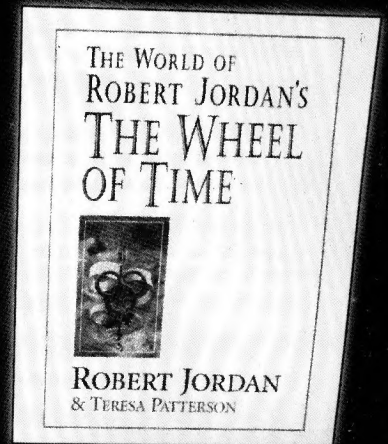
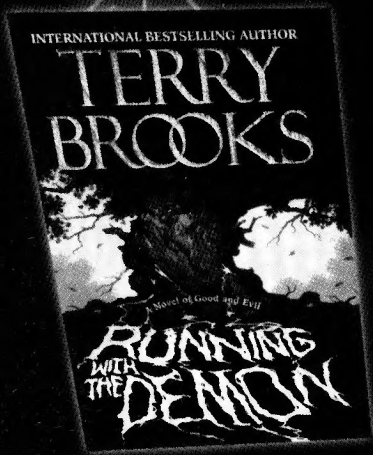
Guest Editor  
**Paul Brazier**





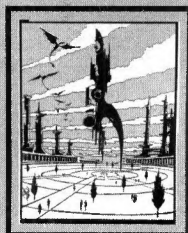
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217 Preston Drove, Brighton BN1 6FL,  
United Kingdom.

All subscriptions, back-issue orders,  
general correspondence, books for  
review, and enquiries about advertising  
should be sent to this address.

#### **Subscriptions:**

£32 for one year (12 issues) in the UK.

Cheques or postal orders should be  
crossed and made payable to *Interzone*.

Overseas subscriptions are £38,  
payable by International Money Order.

Payments may also be made by  
MasterCard, Visa or Eurocard: please  
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will be charged at the £ sterling rate.)

Alternatively, American subscribers  
may pay by dollar check, drawn on a  
U.S. bank, at \$60. (All copies to other  
continents are sent by Air Saver, i.e.  
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#### *Lifetime subscriptions:*

Lifetime subscriptions: £320 (UK);  
£380 (overseas); \$600 (USA).

#### **Back-issues**

of *Interzone* are available at £3 each in  
the UK

(£3.50 each overseas), postage included.  
(US dollar price: \$6 Air Saver.)

All issues are in print *except* numbers  
1-2, 4-13, 15-24, 31, 33, 37, 51 & 60.

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# interZone

January 1998

127

science fiction & fantasy

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**Cover by SMS** for "Christmas with Mary"

Published monthly. All material is © *Interzone*, 1997, on behalf of the various contributors

**ISSN 0264-3596**

Printed by KP Litho Ltd, Brighton

**Trade distribution:** Diamond Magazine Distribution Ltd.,

Unit 7, Rother Ironworks, Fishmarket Road, Rye,

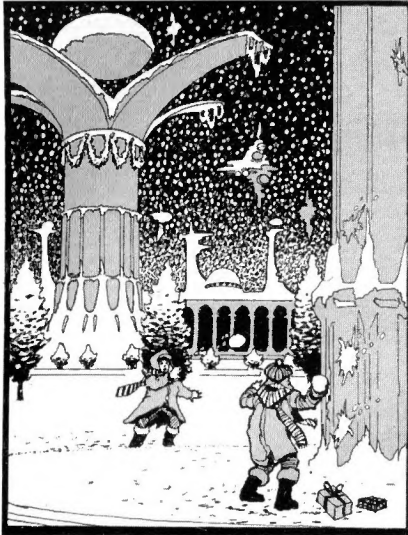
East Sussex TN31 7LR (tel. 01797 225229).

**Bookshop distribution:** Central Books,

99 Wallis Rd., London E9 5LN (tel. 0181 986 4854).



# Merry Christmas?



Call me sentimental if you will, but I like Christmas, and I think it's worth making an effort to make it fun. Perhaps this springs from my experiences. I had good childhood Christmases – I never realised we were poor until I grew up and compared notes, so I guess my Mum did a first-class job – followed by typically angsty teen-and-twenty Christmases that culminated when my step-father died on Christmas Day with my Mum and me at his bedside. But my Mum emigrated to Australia, and I bought a flat, and then all my flat-mates went home at Christmas, and so I was on my own again. In 1983 I went to Sudan as a teacher, where I became extremely ill and nearly died; I spent Christmas Day on my own in the house of a kindly Sudanese in Wad Medani who



kept me isolated from his family because no one knew what was wrong with me. I survived – just. I was under ten stone that Christmas, and anyone who knows my current portly 18-stone-plus bulk will know how drastic this was. I found a mirror in Khartoum, the first I had seen in six months, and didn't recognize the narrow, gaunt, bearded figure I saw there.

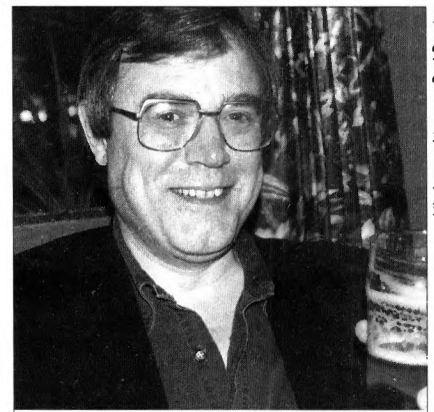
I came home from Sudan to new flatmates provided by my old friend

Jennifer – that's her on page 52, now married to Keith. And my Christmases began to change. One of my new flatmates, Sandra, was on a dance course that by pure coincidence was being attended by Debbie, a friend from Sudan. During the riotous time leading up to Christmas that year, one of their friends, Janit, turned up at a party with a rainbow wig and spock ears, which I insisted on wearing all evening and on the tube going home. She took a rather fine photograph of me in this outfit, and I was so pleased with the result that I had 35 copies made and sent them to friends as Christmas cards.

I used to be one of those grouches who never sent cards. I despise the commercialization of Christmas. I am not religious, but I don't see what money has to do with Christmas. Or charity, for that matter. I resent the way the urge to spend that this capitalist system amplifies at Christmas has been linked to the guilty feeling of self-indulgence and thus exploited to generate income for charities to soothe our consciences. I went to Sudan because I firmly believe that giving money is wrong: if you want to give, give of yourself.

No, I never sent cards until that picture. That same Christmas, a solemn but beautiful woman at the City Lit sf evening class handed me a home-made Christmas card and, to cut a long story short, four years later, Juliet and I were married (that's us on the left). Together, we have created and sent out a card every Christmas since. Most years we

"The greatest favour you can do for anyone is to help them to think clearly." So said **George Hay**, whose death was reported in IZ 126. He was a dear friend whom I saw too seldom; and his epigrammatic utterances echo in my memories of him. He was a regular attendee at our mid-summer parties, and will be sadly missed. Our condolences go out to Molly Gillam, his long-time best friend.

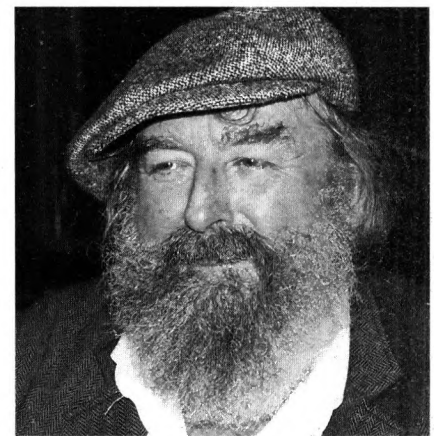


## Editor's Note

Cheers! Apart from Dave Langford's column, the book reviews and my own "Books Received," I hand the editorship of this seasonal issue entirely to our designer and typesetter Paul Brazier, who will, I am sure, do a fine job. Regular columnists Wendy Bradley and Nick Lowe are both resting this month. Back to usual service next issue.

**David Pringle**

*Ho, ho, ho! With a twinkle in his eye, this famous face was spotted in a Soho pub recently. And although it looked just like Sontag, in fact it was Michael Moorcock, after attending the launch of the David Gornett's latest edition of New Worlds.*



write a story together and Juliet produces an illustration (this year's, about the dragon that lives under London Bridge, is currently in production, but too late for this magazine). SMS (who supplied the wonderful snowball scene on this page, bless him) asked me why these stories didn't appear in *Interzone*, and I said I thought David Pringle (that's him up there, smiling) found them too whimsical – but he might publish other people's Christmas stories. All I had to do was get some. So, last Christmas, I asked David if I could guest-edit this issue, and here we are.

So now you all know why you have this special issue. It has been hard work, but worth it. I am still astonished by the wonderful efforts of the writers and artists. I don't often read any story more than once; in the course of the past few months, I have read each of these stories five or six times, and I am still finding new and wonderful things in them. Thank you all. Extra special thanks to Dominic and Gerry, and they know why.

**Paul Brazier**



The first couple of girls I saw, I thought they were hitchhikers. I'm not naïve, but that stretch of the E75, between Częstochowa and Piotrków Tryb, must be the most lost, godforsaken highway on earth. Talk about the middle of nowhere... It was so incongruous. You wondered how the hell *anyone* came to be there, least of all this plump unattractive young woman with thick thighs puce in the cold, in a crocheted miniskirt and a strange little satin jacket, skipping about beside the traffic like a lonesome child; or this other girl, skinny as a rake, with her dishwater hair, black hot pants and pathetic thigh-high patent boots. After the third I got the idea. I sat up and watched, it was something to break the monotony. I couldn't work out why they were here in such numbers. I'd never seen whores plying beside a Polish freeway before. World War Two bomb craters, yes. Kids skateboarding on six-lane high speed curves abandoned half way through the building; pot-holes, crevasses; ambling horses and carts. But never anything like this line of shivering, primping ugly girls.

"How do they get here?"

My friend shrugged. "Their pimps drop them off, I suppose. It's none of my concern."

"But what makes this stretch so popular?"

"Habit. Police protection, how should I know? Word passes round."

He spoke excellent English, my friend. I went on staring, bemused, at the cabaret. The sex must be dirt cheap, but how could anyone get turned on in such a setting? I could tell that my friend thought my interest was in poor taste. He glanced at me, and settled his eyes back to the gliding, jolting grey road ahead with a frown.

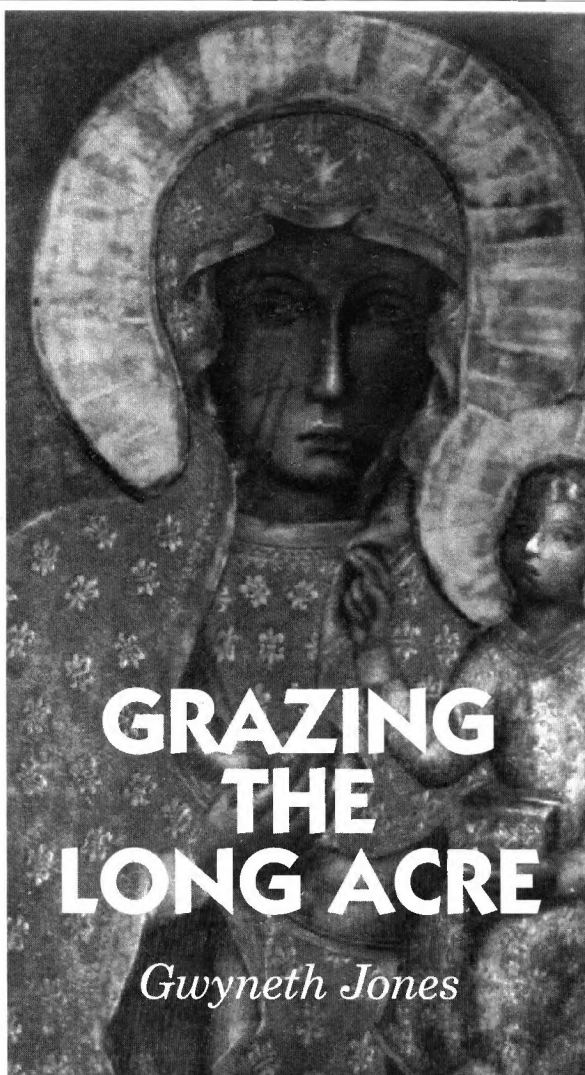
"Something preys on them."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. Something kills them. Sometimes they find a body, sometimes nothing but a heap of dirty clothing. Some devil... It's been going on for a while, maybe years. Many, maybe thirty, fifty girls have died. Or more. Of course the police do nothing."

"God, how awful."

"It's a pollution problem," he added. I was afraid for a moment that he was approving of the predator. But he was a decent enough guy, my friend. "There are monsters who feel they have a right to do away with women of this kind. They are a product of our crazy society, animals like that. A pollution, like the air and the water problems."



# GRAZING THE LONG ACRE

*Gwyneth Jones*

"But if they're getting killed, why do they keep on working here?"

"Why not? What else would they do?"

Sometimes you'd see an actual deal: a girl leaning into the open door of a halted car. Two of them getting down from the cab of a truck; the second slipped, scraped her bare buttocks on the crusted dirt of the bumper and recovered herself exclaiming, adjusting the grubby scarlet thong that divided her backside. "Grazing the long acre," I said.

"What's that?"

It was an expression my Irish grandmother had taught me. It's what peasants used to do in the old country, when they had a cow but no pasture. They'd send the kids out to lead her along the roadside and eat weeds. If you say someone's 'grazing the long acre', it means something like making the best of a bad job, with a little cunning thrown in. I explained this to my friend. He liked 'grazing the long acre'. He said it sounded Polish. It made him laugh.

We drove on south to Częstochowa, where he had business. I went to see the famous icon of the Black Madonna, the most sacred object in Poland – which is saying something in this country full of sainted hallowed holy bones and swords and tombs. In the year 1430, some vandals tried to steal the picture. They couldn't shift it so they slashed her face instead. Apparently she started bleeding real blood, and that was the debut of her miraculous career. So the story goes, and there's still a mark on her cheek to prove it. I didn't see anything, actually. The place was far too crowded, thick with patriotic crocodiles of schoolchildren and rattling with the brusque, hectoring voices of tour guides. But I bought a postcard.

Then we went on south to Kraków, where we stayed in a very nice hotel near the Słowacki Theatre. My friend left me alone for long stretches while he did whatever they do, these well-built Polish men in well made suits, with their big-shouldered physical *presence* that you could cut with a knife. It was the beginning of April, very cold and still not really the tourist season; but I did a lot of sightseeing. One day I went to see what's left of the Jewish Quarter: which is not much. I sat on a bench next to some dignified memorial or other, in a public garden by the Ariel café; which is fashionable with American tourists. I was brought up a Catholic as far as anything, but I'm Jewish enough in ethnic origin that I had a weird sense of belonging, sitting by that cold stone. I thought of the sixty thou-



sand people who had been stripped out of these streets by the Nazis, and wondered how they'd feel about their errant child. Jewish Internationalism, that's me. I'm one place where the ancient, nation-stateless, assimilating spirit ended up... other than Auschwitz. I tried to visit the old Jewish cemetery, but it was all locked up. I walked along by the ballast of the railway line and picked up a blackened larch cone as a memento, which I keep still; I'm not sure why.

I don't think my friend liked the fact that I'd been to the ghetto. But we didn't quarrel. He was never nasty to me, never raised his voice. The day afterward we headed north again. I thought we were going back to Warsaw, but he didn't say. We went by the same route, on the good old E75. Most foreigners in Poland take the train or fly from one tourist destination to another, but my friend liked to drive. He didn't say so but I could tell. To have a big car, to travel big distances under his own power, was important to him; it was like the suits. As soon as we were in open country, clear of the commercial ring around Częstochowa, the whores in their tasteless little outfits were there again. But I was cool about it this time and pretended not to notice. About three in the afternoon, he pulled off into a bright, new service area. The middle of the afternoon is hungry-time in Poland, where many people haven't picked up the unhealthy twentieth century habit of dining in the evening; so I knew we were going to eat. He filled up with petrol, parked beside a black-and-chrome Cherokee jeep and guided me into the shiny "Modern Grill Bar"; sat me down and ordered me a pizza.

"Just stay there for a while," he said. "I have to talk to someone."

I had a funny feeling. The place was full. No one took any notice of me, but I was uneasy. Outside the big road went by, slicing through the flat, grey empty fields without a glance, on its way to somewhere real. I picked at my pizza, which was god-awful, and watched the family next to me tucking away sour soup, rice with dill and cream, slabs of fried fish, great heaps of meat and potatoes. Another decade of peasant meals without peasant labour, and the great-looking coltish blondes you see in Kraków and Warsaw will be vast as so many Mid-Westerners. The driver of the Cherokee jeep, a stylish dark-haired woman in a military-grey overcoat, was sitting a few tables away with a cup of coffee. I wondered how old she was. Probably younger than she looked to my foreigner's eyes, because she had the kind of face you meet more often in Europe than in America, beautiful but toughed-out, as if she'd been living hard and wasn't ashamed of it. I thought she looked Jewish, which even today is not the most popular ethnicity in this country. She saw me staring, and smiled a little. I glanced away.

At first I couldn't see where my friend had gone, then I spotted him at a table with two other men the same type as himself. This was normal. It would often happen in restaurants. He'd go off and talk to some buddies, and come back after a while. But I had that bad feeling. None of the men so much as glanced my way, and yet I was sure I was the subject of their conversation. And suddenly I knew what was happening. I went cold all over, because I am such a damned fool.

I was being passed on.

I stood up, casually as I could make it, thinking in my mind so my gestures would match *I am just taking a trip to the john, to powder my nose*. The woman in the grey overcoat had paid for her swift coffee and was leaving. I followed her out, and instead of going to the toilets I put my hand on her arm. I said, in my best Polish, "Can you give me a lift?"

She'd seen me come in with a middle-aged local guy. As soon as she heard me speak she knew I was a foreigner. She could probably work out the rest. She didn't hesitate.

"Sure, come along."

I guessed she might not have been so willing to help if she had known what a clown I was, and how richly I deserved the situation I was in. Luckily she didn't ask for my life story. We went out and climbed into the huge jeep, and drove away. If she'd asked me where I was heading I'd have had no answer. I couldn't speak more than ten words of Polish anyway. But she didn't ask. She didn't say a word until we'd been driving for about ten kilometres. "Would you mind," she said in English then, slowing down. "I have some business."

At this point the forest, which is always there on the edge of the cold flat fields, had closed right in on either side of the road. In Poland, you never lose the sense that this country really belongs to the trees. Sometimes they look pretty sick, but they never give up. There were trees in a thick crowd around the long wooden shack and its churned up parking lot. They made the place look kind of sinister, but appealing.

Inside, the shack was a fancy version of the old-fashioned Polish roadside diner: no plastic, everything wood; mud-coffee and a hand-written menu. For the coffee they don't use a pot or a filter or anything, they just dump boiling water on a heap of grounds and the rest is up to you. Getting anything other than a mouthful of grit is quite an art. She ordered for both of us without asking what I wanted (I was used to that) and we took our glasses of mud to a table. She offered me a cigarette and lit one herself. Close up she was both more good looking and more ravaged than she'd seemed back in the Modern Grill. There were crinkly smoker's creases around her big dark eyes, and a faded scar on her cheek that was only partly concealed by make-up. From the few words she'd spoken I could tell her English was good. I wanted to break the ice, and head off some of the questions she was bound to ask: but then I looked around and I got distracted.

Our diner was the whores' restroom. Here they all were, off duty, their peepshow nakedness looking less ridiculous: as if we, fully dressed, were the ones who had stumbled into a chorus-girls' dressing room. There were a few men, too, eating their meals and joking with the girls in a comradely way, as if this scene was perfectly normal. I couldn't stop staring. I am not naïve, but it was so interesting. There was a constant coming and going. A girl would rush in, pulling a bundle of notes out of her bra. She'd go up to the counter and have an intense discussion with the woman behind it; a narrow-eyed, respectable-looking dame in a rusty brown overall. Some notes would change hands. Sometimes the girl would enlist a friend to help resolve the transaction, and there'd be some sharp exchanges. Or



two of them would dive into one of toilet cubicles at the back of the room, and there'd be much laughter and banging before they emerged, eyes bright and make-up slipping. They came in from the road looking exhausted: they left again refreshed, tugging at their underwear; rearranging nearly naked tits in rats' nests of dirty polyester lace.

It jolted me a little when I realised that my new friend was equally fascinated. She smoked one cigarette and lit another, in silence: absorbed.

"Excuse me," she said at last. "I have to talk to someone."

Off she went, taking her coffee, to chat with a little blonde in a crumpled black vest dress, who'd just walked in.

Well, here I am again, I thought.

The great thing about these old East Bloc countries with the two-tier economies, is that when you find yourself on the street again, suddenly your last scraps of spare change turn into a month's wages. I looked in my purse. I could eat, I could buy a night's lodging if it came to that; wash my smalls out in the basin. I had my toothbrush and my lipstick, what more does a girl need? I went up to the counter and ordered a plate of *bigos*, the universal meat and sauerkraut stew. It came with fresh rye bread. The stew was very good. I wolfed it down and lit another cigarette. I felt like Lauren Bacall in *To Have and Have Not*, the ideal of all teenage runaways. I wished the diner was a hotel so I could stay, and become part of the louche scene. I wished it was Martinique out there instead of a slab of dour *Polsku* highway, but you can't have everything. Romance moves on, it changes locale with the changing times.

There was a flurry going on among the girls, around the blonde: who was slumped with her head on her folded arms, looking in sore need of a pep-up trip to the john. My friend was in the midst of it. I watched without seeming to care, I didn't want to be pushy. I wondered what I'd say when she asked me how did I get into this scrape?

I was at school in Paris. I wasn't failing, I had friends, I wasn't taking drugs. There are smart and pretty bourgeois Paris schoolgirls who sell ass around the *Maréchaux* – that's a ring of Paris road junctions, all called after old generals – for jetset pocket money: I wasn't there. Maybe I just wanted my parents to take notice. Maybe I resented the way they'd brought me up international, following Daddy's job over the world, when I'd have preferred to stay home with my grandmother. In short there was no big reason, no excuse. I wanted to be in a Howard Hawks movie. So I took a flight to Budapest, to see what I could see. I lost my credit cards to a mugger. When my cash had run out and I was thinking about phoning home, I met a guy, another American, in a picture gallery. I told him my troubles, he paid the rent I owed at my pension. He took me out to dinner, we went back to his hotel room.

It was no different from having an older boyfriend, a grown-up who would naturally pay for everything: until one morning a couple of weeks later I woke up, my friend had checked out and there was money on the table. Then I understood, but it didn't matter. He was gone and I didn't have to face him.

Since then I'd been living on my wits. I could have stopped the adventure any time. I didn't want to. It had been fun riding up and down that big road with my Polish friend. It makes you feel part of something exciting, to be cruising with some guy whose mysterious business is like an intriguing foreign film without subtitles. It makes you feel different. I'd been scared by what had happened, or nearly happened, in the Modern Grill Bar. That had given me a shudder, like the time in Kraków's Jewish quarter when I'd suddenly realized I was easily Jewish enough to have been shipped out with the others, down the railway line to the death camp. I like to choose my friends. But it was okay, I'd escaped. Now here I was with this beautiful Jewish-looking woman, who had a thing for hanging out with whores. Another strange encounter, another adventure.

I recalled the story of the predator. Was that true, or something my ex-friend had said to scare me? On the wall behind the counter – where a small TV stood, playing a quiz show with the sound turned down – I saw some Wanted Posters – the kind of thing you get in big train stations: a poorly copied black and white photo of some girl or boy, missing or dead. Have You Seen Her? Do You Know Anything...? I didn't have to know Polish or get close to get the message. There seemed to be a lot of them, scattered among the National Soccer Team pics and the gaudy advertizing: graded in age from grey and battered to brand new. I fantasized that the Jewish woman and I would investigate. She'd be cynical and wary of getting involved, but my belief in her would swing it: we would be a team. Would she accept that role, playing reluctant good guy to my blunt tomboy, Humphrey Bogart to my Bacall? I wished I could make it happen. Trouble is, you can give yourself the illusion of choice but you can't really choose a new protector. They have to choose you.

I was just beginning to get melancholy when she came back to me. "I'm sorry about that," she said, with a smile that left her eyes pensive and sorrowful. "We can go now."

"What was going on?"

"Oh, another girl has disappeared, Malga's friend. The police think she's dead."

"Oh wow, I heard about that shit, the killer. They didn't find a body?"

She shook her head. Her frown said she didn't want to dwell on the subject, so I laid off.

This time she asked me where I was heading. I said Warsaw for the sake of argument. Her English was very good. We talked, neutral stuff about how I liked





Poland and what other countries I'd visited. She knew damn well I wasn't a tourist, but she'd obviously decided to ask no awkward questions and I was too proud to throw myself on her mercy. A song I liked came on the radio. I asked her what the words meant and she translated the catch for me –

If I could spend some time alone with you  
In some place that's hard to find, but easy to remember...

I started to sing along, chopping up the English to make it fit the tune. She laughed, but she didn't seem to take the hint. We got as far as the next roadside restaurant. When she pulled up again, I was puzzled. But somehow I knew she wasn't planning to dump me. It was business again, this *business* they always have, the people you meet when you've fallen or jumped out of the regular, law-abiding world.

"You did well to eat at the other place," she said. "The food here is terrible."

It was the same scene as before, except that the clientèle was more mixed and the girls were more discreet. They wore coats. The same as before, she bought two coffees (granules from a Nescafé sachet, tasting of grease) and left me on my own. I watched her with the girls. You could see that the news about "Malga's friend" had hit this place too. They were like little birds, huddling together in an invisible storm. And my friend was in the middle of it again. But this time I saw the deal. I saw some kind of pills in a clear plastic envelope, slipped from the pocket of the military-grey coat into a hungry teenage hand. You wish there'd be a little more variety, but it's always either drugs or sex. Always.

"What was that?" I said, when she came back. I didn't want her to think I was naïve. "What kind of shit are you selling? Maybe I want some."

She shook her head. "I hope not."

"C'mon. What was it?"

"AZT."

"Oh," I said. "Oh..." I felt gauche and confused. "Is... is that what you do? You ride up and down here selling medical stuff? A kind of whores' paramedic?"

"Not exactly." She sat down, hands deep in the pocket of that excellent coat, gazed into space for a moment, then gave a nod towards the girl – who was leaving, getting back on the job. "How old, do you think?"

"Um... sixteen?" I hazarded. Making her two years younger than me, and dying. So it goes.

"Perhaps, barely. Once upon a time, I was a teenage Jewish girl, engaged to an older man. I had no choice about the marriage. I mean, in my heart I had no choice. Our community, my community was important to me." I nodded. I imagined how she might have felt, growing up Jewish in Communist Poland. "I got pregnant. He knew the baby wasn't his. He also knew that the other guy, the baby's father, was still in my life and always would be. He married me anyway, and brought up my kid as his own. But then he died."

"What about the other guy, the baby's father?"

"Oh, he was still around. Always will be. I'm part of his operation. I have no choice about that, either. You could say that is my big problem." She smiled at me. "So you see, I have a fellow-feeling for these girls. The drugs are only to gain their confidence. What I'm trying to do is to get them out of this life. Completely. But

it's not easy to change even one girl's mind. Being a whore is like an addiction. Everything contributes: friends, circumstances, the idleness; a certain fascination."

I felt uncomfortable. "If you want to save the girls, why don't you go after the guys?"

"Ah!" She laughed, offered me a cigarette and lit one for herself. Her long fingers were stained with nicotine, and nervously beautiful. "And do what? Shoot them in the head? A person has to know he is sick, before he can be made well. It is hard for me to reach 'the guys,' as long as they feel no pain. They have no sense of wrongdoing when they buy sex. The girls are suffering, and that opens the heart." She laughed. "My dear, I wish it were otherwise, but in this time and in this place *suffering* is definitely me."

I didn't say anything. I didn't really care what she was up to, though I guessed I wasn't getting the full picture. The fact that she was talking to me, intimately, was enough. I just loved the sound of her voice, the darkness in the depths of her smile: the sad and mocking laughter in her black eyes. I wanted nothing better than to stay quiet and listen while she gave me glimpses of her complex and mysterious life.

"In the heart of me," she said softly, "there is something that knows nothing of 'right' or 'wrong.' I have been many people, I have had many names. The forms, you know, are nothing. Inside, deep inside, I am still what I always was. I remember that I was born unstained, completely free. But since the great divide had to come into my world, I have to admit, *there is no contest*: I must accept the work that has been given to me. As difficult and long as it may be, we must make things turn out for the best. Do you see what I mean? And the only way it can be done is one piece at a time."

She sipped her cold coffee for a while, preoccupied. "Would you mind coming back with me to Pod Las now?"

"Huh?"

"The first place we stopped. It means 'Under the Forest.'"

So we went back. It was dusk, and getting very cold. We'd hit a slack moment, the room was nearly empty. Yellowish electric light glistened on the wooden walls. The raggedy blonde she'd talked with earlier was almost the only girl in the place. My friend said, "Wait here."

I got myself some tea, cheaper than coffee; and sat down. I wanted to be her sidekick, the fresh page for her experience to write upon. I wondered if she carried a gun, and how much should I believe the Scarlet Pimpernel story about saving fallen women; and was I going to meet this monster, the Mr Big from whom she couldn't escape, my dark lady with the chequered past. The blonde girl called Malga stood up. Her face was drawn and grey, her eyes blank. She headed for the door, my dark lady following.

My friend said quietly as she passed, "Stay here. Don't follow us!"

She went out. I sat for a few minutes. Then I started thinking, about the girl who had just walked by me with the mark of death on her; about the scene I'd witnessed here earlier; about my friend who liked to hang out with whores, but told me that her mission was to



rid the world of girls who sold sex for a living. Soon I had myself completely terrified. I decided that I'd been riding around with a psychopath. My dark lady was the predator! It had to be. Now I understood why she'd asked me no questions. She already knew everything she needed to know. I was alone, I was vulnerable, and the way she'd met me had left her in no doubt that I was her legitimate prey.

The sinister little diner was suddenly drained of romance. Everything changed shape and colour. My American, the one in Budapest, had two little daughters. He didn't tell me that, I looked in his wallet once while he was sleeping and found their pictures. I suppose when they grew up he wanted them to be dentists, or something. But when he met me, he thought it was perfectly okay that I should pay with sex for food and shelter. Was he right? I don't know. He didn't force me. But he didn't march me to a telephone and stand over me while I called my terrified parents. He didn't do anything to haul me back from the brink of the slippery slope. What went through his head? Am I an adult? Am I my brother's keeper? I was going hot and cold by turns. The parched and withered faces of the murdered girls were staring at me from the wall. I was so frightened that I couldn't see any way to resist. She would come back from whatever she did to Malga. She would lead me into her darkness...

The woman behind the counter was giving me strange looks. Finally she came over with a short man in a pork pie hat, one of her more prosperous customers. "Are you wanting a lift?" she asked. "This gentleman can help you."

"No thank you."

"You should take the lift," said the proprietress of the Pod Las. I couldn't ask about the Jewish-looking woman, because I couldn't speak Polish. But from the way she spoke and the look in her eye I knew that she was warning me to get away from here. She was right. The guy looked okay. I would do him and get him to drop me in a town, somewhere away from this damned road, where I would call my parents. Tomorrow or the next day I would call them, I would call them real soon. As soon as I had a story worked out.

We went out into the night. He slipped his arm around my waist. I was looking up and down for the raggedy blonde. I saw something big parked a few hundred metres along the road, no lights. I thought it was the jeep. I could see what looked like a struggle going on. I shouted "Stop that!" and threw off the man's arm. He yelled after me, something like *it's not our concern!* I kept running, beside the stream of traffic, screaming *Leave her alone!* I reached the spot in time to see... Three men's pale faces, flashing angry guilty glances over their shoulders, as they stooped over what seemed like a bundle of dirty clothes.

I saw that the angel of death that stalks girls like my raggedy blonde has not one face but many: disease, neglect, accident, overdose. It's only sometimes murder; and bodies can vanish without much mystery, when no one cares. They dumped their burden, leapt into their big car, slammed the doors; and it roared away. I don't know if they had meant to kill her. I was going to go to her, but someone else was there.

It was my dark lady, the figure of all my hopes and fears. I saw the dead girl's body lying in her arms, in

the gesture of the *pieta*. And then, there seemed to be a human shape cut out of clear darkness, standing in the night where she had been. What did I see? I tremble still at the memory... though I know even this belongs to me: to my sex, my culture, my situation; it is not She. For an instant I believe I saw her unveiled. More than the Lady in any of her faces: what lies beyond them all, sexless; impersonal. I saw the gateway between creation and the uncreated: the innocent, the immaculate void of all our desire, opening and flowering in that cold April night: the traffic roaring by, exhaust fumes in the air, headlights splashing like shoreline waves on the forest eaves.

The man from the Pod Las came running up. He exclaimed and cried (I think) What a terrible thing! and that I mustn't look! He led me back to the diner and the proprietress called the police. There were sirens and lights and they took the girl's body away. I soon discovered that no one else had seen a Jewish-looking woman with a scarred cheek. I'd come into the Pod Las alone, once in the afternoon and then again in the evening. I didn't insist. They'd have thought I was crazy. When the police had found me a hotel for the night, I looked in my purse to see how much money I had left and discovered a wad of notes tucked into the back pocket, with a scrap of paper on which someone had written, in looping old fashioned European handwriting: go home. It was enough for my air fare. I suppose my Polish friend must have tucked the money in there, when he decided to dump me at the Modern Bar Grill. I told you he was a decent enough kind of guy. The rest, the whole dark lady encounter, was my vivid imagination.

And that was the end of my adventure. There were no dreadful consequences, much as I deserved them. It was just a wild adolescent spree. But I kept the paper with the message I like to think she sent me (directly or indirectly); and I keep the picture of her I bought up on my wall. I think of her often, my impossible She. I wonder is she still driving up and down, between Częstochowa and Piotrków Tryb, saving souls? And I think about going home.

## for Ruth and David Sinclair-Jones

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**Gwyneth Jones** (seen here with her son Gabriel outside Marie Curie's house in Warsaw last Easter) has appeared several times before in *Interzone*, and also graced the pages of *SF Nexus* with travelogues disguised as book reviews. This story springs from a visit to Poland early in 1997. She comments, "The background

details are all true, there is just such a stretch of freeway, next to the town where they keep the most sacred icon of the virgin, with just such a weird concentration of roadside girls. The Virgin Mary a suspected serial killer? Is nothing sacred?"

Her latest books are *Phoenix Café* from Victor Gollancz, and, as Ann Halam, *The Powerhouse* from Orion.



**I** Mary Moss lived in two rooms on the south side of the base, in one of the big blocks. She was Moss by her second husband, Ryan by her first, who had died. Moss had run off, thirty years ago. Their children had gone too, in their turn.

Mary worked as a cleaner up on the fertility station. She had been working there ever since they had put it up. They all knew her, up there. They called her Ma.

It was the twenty-fourth of December, Christmas Eve, and Mary was off to work. She had her pack, with the things she needed for her week, and she had put in the things she had been collecting, the little seasonal extras. "I'll see you all right," said Mary, though there was no one there to hear.

The weather was hot, the sky was blue, the palm trees up the road were heavy and green. Mary could remember a different kind of Christmas, at home, when she was a girl. It was always cold, perishing cold, and cloudy. They always hoped there would be snow, though there never was.

She got to the stop for the perimeter bus. She was in plenty of time, so she sat on the bench and had a smoke, and watched the cars go by. On one side of the road they rushed into the city, and on the other side they rushed out again. There was no end to them, either way.

The bus when it came was full as ever, everybody

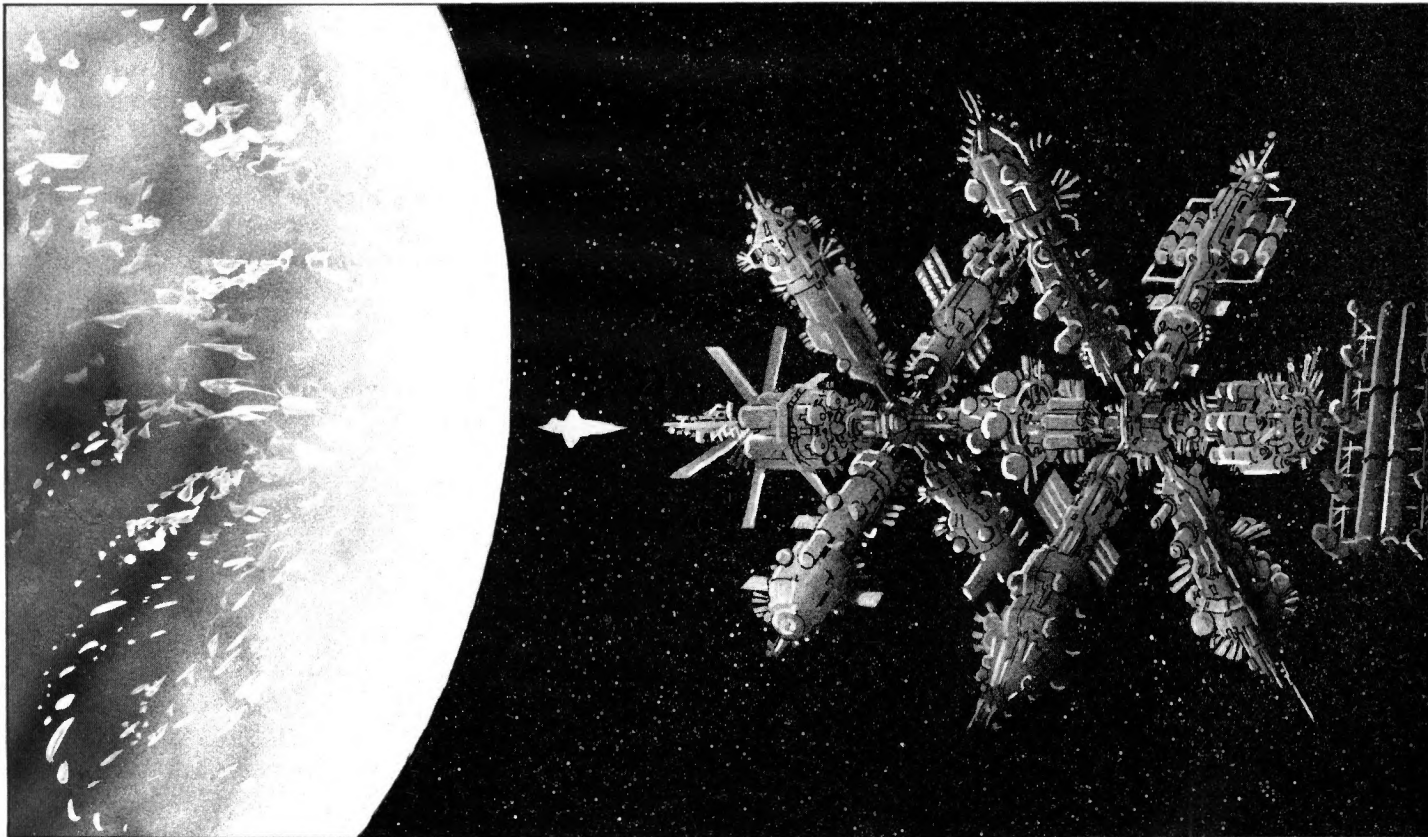


Illustration by SMS

# *Christmas with Ma*

with heavy bags and parcels. The bus driver was a clone. They were around now, outside the base. You saw them sometimes, driving a bus or cleaning the street. The unions were still up in arms about it, but the unions had never been strong here.

When Mary had first heard the word, years ago, she had thought they were saying *clown*, that it was clowns that were going to be doing all the work one day. She wouldn't mind that, a clown driving your bus. Give

everyone a laugh, on their way to work in the morning.

Nothing funny about a clone, though. They were all exactly the same, and all they did was their job. The only funny thing about a clone was, they were blue. It was something the governments had insisted on, from the start, so that nobody could ever make a mistake.

At the main gate the guard leaned out of the window. His arms were bare and brown. The sunlight shone on his sunglasses.

"Hey, Ma," he said. "Ain't they all down from up there?"

His name was Ray, and he was a nice boy. "She's still there," said Mary, and he smiled, as though she had said something funny. She gave him her pass. "It's my week," she said.

He folded his arms while the pass scanned. "You make sure they give you the overtime," he warned her. "For the holiday season."

He seemed to feel she needed protecting, bless him. That was men for you. Mary didn't need protecting. She'd been looking after herself since before Ray was born. She had raised three the size of him and sent them out into the world.

"When's the shuttle?" he asked her. "You got plenty of time, Ma. You want a coffee?"

Mary sat in the gatehouse and drank a cup of coffee with him. It was just how she liked it, milky with three sugars.

"What yer doing, then?" she asked. "What yer doing tomorrow, Ray?"

The guard stirred his coffee. "Tomorrow we go to my in-laws," he said. "Take the kids. They like to see the kids at Christmas."

Mary had never met her in-laws, Moss's mum and dad. She didn't even know if they were still alive.

"Where are they, then," she asked him, "your in-laws?"

The guard drank his coffee. "Across town," he said. "My folks live up the coast. One year we go to one, next year the other. Last year we went to my folks. This year it's hers."

Mary sat and dangled her feet. The chairs were all too high for her. What Mary lacks in height, her first husband had always told everybody, she makes up in heart. He had been an old softie, and she had loved him best. They had had a year and a week together, before the cancer took him.

Mary looked out the window of the gatehouse. The sun shone down on the green lawns, the white concrete paths. The paths were swept, the lawns cut and watered. There was no one in sight.

"I don't know," said Mary comfortably. "Where does everybody go at Christmas, eh?"

Ray the guard took his sunglasses off. "I told you, Ma," he said, uncertainly, almost bashfully. "One year we go to my folks, the next we go to hers."

"No," she said, scolding him for being stupid. "No, no, listen. Wherever you go, wherever you are, everyone always goes away for Christmas. Right?"

"That's right," said the guard.

"Everywhere you go, everywhere's deserted," said Mary. "Nobody around."



Colin Greenland



"I guess," said the guard.

"Well, then," said Mary. "Where do they all go?"

The guard thought about it. "Beats me, Ma," he said. He put his sunglasses back on and leaned out the window. "They don't come here," he said. "That's for sure. Here's your transport, Ma."

The transport took Mary to the shuttle pad. The transport driver was another clone. He wasn't getting overtime for the holiday season, she was sure of that. They didn't get overtime, and they didn't cause accidents. They kept their eyes on the road and their hands on the wheel. That was the whole reason for them.

The transport stopped. "Shuttle Departures," said the clone, as if Mary hadn't been coming here for the last ten years.

She struggled out of her seat. "Merry Christmas," she said to the clone.

"Merry Christmas," he echoed. His face was as blue and as empty as the sky.

The departure room had twenty-four orange plastic chairs, in six rows of four. No one was sitting on any of them. Mary put her pass in the machine and sat down in the front row, with her backpack on her knee. Her feet didn't reach the ground.

When the time came to board, the flight clerk stuck her head round the door. The rest of the chairs were still vacant. The flight clerk smiled to see Mary waiting there.

"Hello, Ma," she said. "What are you doing here?"

"Merry Christmas," said Mary. "It's my week."

"Merry Christmas to you too, Ma," said the flight clerk. Her name was Lucilla. She was very smart and impressive in her uniform, like all of them. You would have thought she was space traffic controller at least.

"I guess dust doesn't take vacations, right?" said the flight clerk.

"You can say that again," said Mary.

The flight clerk typed on her keyboard.

"Just got to weigh the pack, Ma, and we'll be all ready for you."

Mary put the backpack on the counter. The flight clerk typed. She picked the pack up and hefted it. It was very light. "What you got in here?" she said. "Christmas presents?"

"A couple," Mary said.

Lucilla the flight clerk made a big round mouth. "Oh, oh, oh!" she said musically. "What you got me, what you got me?"

Mary gave a wheezy chuckle. "They're not for you!" she told Lucilla. "They're for Mary."

Lucilla drew her head back and blinked deliberately. "For Mary," she repeated, drily, as if it was something she didn't really believe. "Right." She winked, willing to share a joke, and held the pack out for Mary to take.

"Clear to board, Ma. Have a good trip."



Mary was the only one going through Passenger Ingress. She stood with her backpack on in the little white cubicle while the light went from green to red, then back again. That was all you could see, but Mary knew she was sterile now. Funny to build a fertility station and then make everyone sterile when they came in the door.

Mary collected her overall and her tools. She didn't

have to check the screen, she knew her routine. She'd been doing it the same for nearly a year now, since they'd given her Generation. Generation she would do last.

First, she did the green route walkways, and then the exercise room. There was no one in there exercising. Mary vacuumed the floor and wiped the windows. Outside, the Earth hung like a big shiny white and blue bauble on a Christmas tree.

Next, she did the orange route walkways. There was no one around there either, so she gave them a good go. She took up the cling mats and hoovered underneath. She got on nice and quick. The place was never very dirty, definitely not as bad as down below at home. Mary worked her way inwards, towards Generation.

Generation was the cleanest sector of all. That made it the easiest, really. In Generation, the only dirt was what came out. The reason they put your money up when they gave you Generation was, it was the most important sector. It was what they called the primary production centre, and the most sensitive area.

There was always somebody on duty in the Generation control room, twenty-four hours a day. Today it was Dooley. It would have to be him, poor little bleeder, drawing the short straw over Christmas. Mary felt sorry for him. Look at him now, switching off his porn video when she pressed the buzzer, hoping she hadn't noticed.

"Hi, Ma," said Dooley, letting her in. "Happy Christmas." He gave her his usual sickly smile.

He was all right really, Dooley. They were all all right, the Generation lot, and Mary was their favourite, so they always said. She liked a bit of a chat and a laugh, and so did they. Of course, a lot of the others were clones now, on all the shifts, and you couldn't have a chat and a laugh with a clone, not even if you were one of them who'd looked after it back before it was born. When she retired, they'd be replacing Mary with a clone too. She was well aware of that.

Mary took off her backpack and put it by the inner door, the one that went into the gestation chamber. Dooley gave the pack a look, Mary saw. He didn't ask.

She wiped the observation window with an impregnated cloth, going carefully along the beading. On the other side of the window, in the chamber, the other Mary seemed to be asleep.

They were both called Mary, that was the funny thing. Mary Moss polished the window, and the other Mary lay in her cradle with her blind face pointed to the ceiling.

"How's Her Highness?" Mary asked Technician Dooley.

"She's fine," he said. He looked around his console, checking the numbers, the little different-coloured screens, making sure of what he said. Then he gave a big stretch, and squeezed the muscles at the base of his neck. "Only eighteen minutes till my dinner," he said.

Mary vacuumed the floor. "Christmas dinner?" she said.

"You bet," said the technician.

"You're looking forward to that," said Mary.

"You bet," said the technician. "You want a cup of coffee?"

"You'll spoil your appetite," said Mary.

"Not me," said the technician. He got two cups and went over to the machine.

He came back with their coffees, put them on the table and sat down in his chair. He studied his console again while he reached in his inside pocket and pulled out a

hipflask.

Mary tutted, and switched off the vacuum. "What have yer got there?" she asked, knowing perfectly well.

The technician put his finger to his lips and poured a big dose of something into the coffee. "Christmas spirit," he said.

"Christmas spirit!" scoffed Mary complacently. "Well, I don't know." She peeled her gloves off and sat herself down opposite Dooley.

He grinned and toasted her with his cup. He wriggled in his chair. He was always full of nervous energy, restless as a kid.

Mary sipped her coffee. The fumes from the brandy went straight up her nose and tickled her brain. "You tell me the answer to this one, then," she said. "Where does everyone go, at Christmas?"

Dooley put his coffee cup down and twiddled his thumbs. "Different places," he said. "They go away."

"That's right," said Mary. "They go away. Everyone always goes away, don't they, eh?" She waved her hand, to make the point. "Where do they go?"

Dooley understood. He put his head back and scratched under his chin. "Well," he said, in his rapid, squeaky voice, "what it is, Ma, if you think about it logically, they change places. You see?"

He started drawing with his finger on the table between them, making an invisible map. "You've got the people born in this city here, let's call it City A. They grow up, they leave City A, they go and live in City B; but they go back to City A for Christmas. Hm? To see their friends, their families. Meanwhile over here, this is City B, people who were born in City B live in Cities C and D and E, when Christmas comes they come *back* to City B and make up the deficit."

He sat back and twiddled his thumbs again. "Of course that's very very simplified."

Mary laughed at him. "Sounds complicated enough to me!"

"You could probably plot it," he suggested. "Satellite telescope array over a given area. Track the licence plates over time." His smile was broad, his eyes were dreamy. "You'd get a distribution with peak activity about, oh, six hours ago."

Mary looked at the clock. "It's Christmas, Mr Dooley," she said. She drained her coffee and put on her surgical gloves. "Merry Christmas to you."

She picked up her pack and went through the door into the gestation chamber.

"And a Merry Christmas to you too, Mary," she said loudly. "A Merry Christmas to you, and Best Wishes for a Happy New Year."

There was no reply.

Mary went over to the sanitation locker. She broke the seal and got out a toolkit.

"Remember me?" she said.

She could feel the brandy he'd put in the coffee, like a nice warm glow inside. She telescoped out the microvac.

"I'm Mary," she reminded her silent listener. "Like you."

She started dusting. She went around all the surfaces properly, though there wasn't enough dust to register. There never was.

"Ma, they call me," she said. "Remember Ma? Eh?"

She switched off the vac.

"Course yer don't," she said.

She put back the vac and took out the autoswab. She triggered the detergent and started her mopping.

She looked at Dooley, in the control room there. He was doing some work now. He had his headphones over his ears. He was typing.

She lifted a bundle of feeder tubes and ducked under it.

"Dooley in there," she said as she mopped on, "he was just explaining it to me. About the way people move around. About everyone going away for Christmas."

She wiped the feeder nozzles.

"They all go away and leave you on yer own," she said.

No point letting it get you down, though. Not at Christmas. You could always get up and go away yourself, even if it was only off to work. This shift was good for that. That was the reason she always took it. It wasn't the extra money. The money was good, but she didn't really need the extra.

"I told you about my Bobby," she said, kneeling down to get under the fixtures. "He's in Australia. He's doing all right. He's got his own beach. Course, he works hard for it, putting the umbrellas out and taking them in. Raking up the rubbish. He'll be sitting in his café now, if I know Bobby, drinking his lagers."

The cleaning woman gave a short laugh, and stood up. Working up here was easier, whatever anyone said. Standing up was easier, for one thing.

"My Donald, he's in Singapore," she said. "He married a lovely girl out there. Course, I've not seen her. Only on the video."

She stepped carefully in between the tubes. "Lovely video," she said.

She mopped the drain hatches, the edges of the seals.

"Gawd knows where my Laurie is. Ain't seen her in years. She's the one I'd *like* to have a telescope on, that Laurie."

She chuckled, and dropped the swab in for cleansing.

She sat down on the edge of the cradle for a minute. She looked in her backpack and found her cigarettes. She shook one out of the box and put it in her mouth.

That woke Dooley up. He came through on the p.a. "*No smoking on the station, Ma.*"

She flapped her hand at him. She put the cigarette back in the packet, and put the packet away.

"Only teasing yer, Dooley," she said.

She looked around the chamber. The bright eyes of the machines stared back at her. Outside the window, space ran away, black and empty and frosted with white fire.

"Where's your kids, then, Mary? Not coming?"

She frowned, and picked gently at a minute fleck of something on the stainless steel.

"They ought to come and wish their old mum a Happy Christmas, didn't they," she said.

She drew a capsule from her kit and dabbed the fleck free. She wiped it up with a tissue.

"All of them," she said. She chuckled chestily.

She leaned over the cradle and wiped the edge the other side.

"Do they remember, though? Do they know you're their mum? I bet they don't."

She looked in her backpack again.

"You know, though," she said. "You know, Mary, don't you?"

Mary in the cradle never answered. She had no vocal cords. There were no speech centres in her brain. Mary



didn't need speech to express herself. They knew exactly how Mary was feeling, every instant, the Generation technicians. Every part of her, every organ, every gland and duct and membrane was constantly monitored by electrodes. Her system was completely regulated, for the good of her children.

"I bet you can tell them all apart," said Mary the cleaning woman.

She started unpacking the things she had brought in her backpack.

"Here you are, then," she said. "Got some things for yer."

The first thing out of the pack was the end off a white plastic bottle brush. She had cut it off and stuck it upright in the bright red cap from a bottle of bleach.

Dooley was on the p.a. again. "*What the hell have you got there, Ma?*"

Mary held it up for him to see. It sparkled in the sterile light. She had painted it with some glittery nail varnish Laurie had left behind.

"There you are," she said. "That's your Christmas tree."

She laughed and stood it at the end of the cradle, on a bit of machinery.

Dooley laughed too.

"*What else have you got there?*"

Mary took out a little packet, like a miniature book of coloured paper with the pages tightly pressed together. There was an elastic band round it.

Mary slipped off the band. She took the packet top and bottom in either hand and pulled it apart. Suddenly a chain of paper links stretched between her hands: green, yellow, red and blue.

"That's your Christmas decorations."

Dooley sniggered and shook his head.

"Ain't it your break time now?" she asked him.

"*That's right,*" he said. "You go on," she told him. "She's all right. You go and get your turkey and mince pies."

Dooley set some switches and went off. Mary continued her unpacking.

She produced a long sliver of yellow wood, thin as the thinnest knitting needle. It was coated in something powdery and grey.

"What this is," she said, "is one of them joss sticks."

She looked around and chose a spot for it. She chose an inspection hatch, where the ash would fall on metal and do no harm. She inserted the bare end of the stick in the edge of the hatch. When she had it stable, she fished out her cigarette lighter and set a flame to the coated end.

"No smoking, he says, but what the heck."

The tiny tip of the joss stick started to glow red. "It's Christmas," Mary said.

In the control room a tiny, persistent peeping noise began to sound.



3 Mary Moss the cleaning woman opened the slide on her overall. Underneath she wore a black dress with big red flowers on it. Geraniums, they were.

"This is me party dress, Mary," she said. "D'you like it?"

She had hung up the paper chains. Through the observation window, if you squinted a bit, you could make the little lights on the control panels twinkle, just like Christmas lights.

"I last wore this dress the last time Bobby went back to Australia. We had a bit of a knees-up. We had a bit of a do."

She lifted the skirt of her dress and danced a slow, experimental step. Dancing would be easier up here, too.

"Why don't they have a party?" she said. "Dooley and his pals. Being as it's Christmas."

She reached in her backpack again.

"People don't know how to enjoy themselves these days."

Blue smoke from the joss stick curled gently into the air duct above the inspection hatch. The peeping noise continued.

"I know where everybody goes at Christmas," confided Mary Moss to the other Mary, as she took something else from her backpack. This time it was a very small bottle, made of pale blue plastic.

"Indoors," she said. "That's where they all go."

She took the cap off the bottle. A slight new fragrance escaped into the air.

"Indoors, and good luck to 'em."

She went to the side of the cradle.

"This is some perfume," she explained.

She tipped up the bottle and put the tip of her finger under it. A drop of clear liquid ran out.

"Make you smell nice, Mary."

She leaned into the cradle and dabbed some of the liquid on the blue skin of her namesake. She dabbed it just behind the bumps where her ears should have been, and under what there was of her chin.

"They ought to do this for you, Mary," she said, "when they give you your wash. Every woman likes to put on a bit of perfume now and then. Every woman likes to smell nice, don't she?"

Her voice was hushed and considerate, though the occupant of the cradle could not hear her.

"There, now."

She drew her finger between the breasts of Mary in the cradle. There were ten of them: big, soft breasts arranged in five pairs of two down her front. Between the top pair, Mary the cleaner wiped the last drop of perfume from her finger. Beneath the skin she could feel the big, swollen heart solemnly, constantly beating.

"There. That's nice, ain't it?"

The blue skin of Mary in the cradle was not blue like the blue skin of old people, the blue of aging blood vessels showing through. It wasn't blue-black, either, like the skin of dolphins or blue whales. It was a blue like nothing in nature. It was the bright, clear, optimistic blue of party balloons; of beach toys; of inexpensive blue plastic globes of the Earth that you hang inside the windscreen of your car, that turn like compasses so you always know which way you're heading.

Her pelvis had been gigantized and reinforced, the antenatal phase extended to eleven months, to facilitate the necessary cytoplasmic intervention and foetal endocrine adjustments. Her cerebellum had been drastically simplified, to preside over the residual autonomic functions. The rest was just plumbing.

"*What are you up to in there, Ma?*"

It was Dooley. The heat detection alarm had finally roused him from the canteen. He came across the control room, polystyrene container in one hand, plastic fork in the other. "*Is something burning?*"

"Hello, Mr Dooley," said Mary Moss. "You see if you can guess what it is."

His eyes narrowed as he spotted the smouldering joss stick.

"That's frankincense, that's what. It ain't half nice. Come in here and have a smell."

"Jesus Christ."

Dooley forked another mouthful in. He went to the console and started pressing switches.

"That's right," said the cleaning woman. "He was the one."

The peeping noise stopped. Dooley checked his read-outs, chewing. He grimaced and shook his head.

Mary put the cap back on the perfume. "That's frankincense, and this is myrrh," she said, holding up the bottle.

"You care about all that stuff?" said Dooley, swallowing. He stared expressionlessly through the observation window.

"Well, course, it's not actually myrrh, not really," said Mary the cleaner to Mary in the cradle. "But that's all it was, myrrh. Just a kind of perfume."

She stowed the bottle back inside her pack.

"Smelled like mothballs, the chemist reckons. They used to put it on dead people."

She made a face at the unresponsive woman. "Not very cheerful, that, is it? I got you some cologne instead."

Dooley came and stood at the window. "You're just confusing her, Ma," he said. "The only thing she knows about scent is the clone pheromones. The smell of newborn baby."

"Ah, go on with yer, Dooley," said Mary stoutly. "You don't begrudge her her little bit of pleasure. A nice bit of perfume."

She patted the heavy double arch of the breastbone of Mary in the cradle. "It's a bit better than mothballs, eh, Mary?"

In the control room, Dooley made the short, high-pitched noise of one who, without rancour, abandons an argument because the other person is not even listening. He put another forkful of food in his mouth.

"You want some turkey, Ma? There's tons. Just go in the canteen and help yourself."

"In a minute, Dooley," said Mary gravely, as the technician turned from the window. "In a minute." She was looking in her backpack again. "This is the last one," she said.

Dooley turned back to look.

Mary pulled out a paper bag. It was twisted up so small there might have been nothing in it at all.

"This is the gold," she said.

She untwisted the bag and put her fingers inside.

"Now, it's not fancy high-price gold," she told the recipient of her gifts. "Only nine carat, whatever that is. It was the best we could afford, bless him. But it's not doing me any good, is it? I don't wear it. I haven't worn it since me second."

She spoke very softly and seriously to the other woman.

"He didn't like me wearing another man's ring."

Mary took the ring out of the paper bag and showed it to the woman in the cradle. "He was always going to get me another one," she said. "He promised he was."

She laughed a curt, bronchial laugh. "Was he heck."

"Uh, hate to point this out, but she's got no fingers, Ma," said Dooley, stating the obvious.

Mary looked up at the window. "She's got no husband either," she said firmly, as though whatever logic there might be was on her side.

She leaned into the cradle again, looking for a place

where Mary could wear the ring. There was nowhere, except round one of her swollen nipples, where it would surely slide off when she moved.

"I'll put it here," she told the surrogate mother, and she placed the gold ring on the side of the cradle. "There it is, if you ever need it."

She straightened up. "It's good to have a ring," she said, "when you've got no husband."

Mary the mother stirred somnolently in her cradle. Inside her vast blue belly the clones were quietly budding. Beneath her vestigial feet, the stars spread wide across the window, like a snowstorm arrested in mid-whirl.

Mary Moss the cleaning woman, her gifts all given, smiled down at the blue Madonna of the Winterzone.

"Merry Christmas, Mary," she said.

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Photo: Bryan Talbot

Despite being one of the *Interzone's* co-founders, **Colin Greenland** (seen here with Susanna Clarke) has never published fiction here – although his diary column was a popular feature of *SF Nexus*. His most recent book is a collection of short stories, *The Plenty Principle*, from HarperCollins' Voyager imprint, and *Mother of Plenty*, the final volume in the *Tabitha Jute* trilogy is scheduled to appear in July 1998.

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**B**ack at the beginning of December a hotel waiter had tipped coloured dyes into the sparkling plumes of water. Now the three frozen fountains outside the hotel looked like ice-cream desserts, kirsch, lemon, blue curaçao. Hoho and 'tis the season to be jolly; Angus Grey, lugging his case from the coach, up the icy steps and into the stale warmth of the hotel reception.

Angus loitered by the illuminated Christmas tree while the other package holiday-makers pressed the reception desk. Then he saw a dead one; just a reminder should he be tempted to relax. Hanging from the tree were carved ski-baubles: here a skier in a chair-lift among the red bows and the silver globes.

"I'm Caitlin," the tour rep said, professional smile. She was a Welsh spirit from the Rhondda with a bruised look and permanently-parted lips. "Welcoming party at six o'clock. Free glass of schnapps!"

"No," said Angus, plucking up his room key. He headed for the lift, turning his back on a moué of displeasure. In his room he twisted the cap off a bottle of duty-free Scotch and proceeded to hang up his clothes. He didn't want free schnapps; didn't want to hear superannuated jokes about *fahnting* on the piste; most of all he didn't want to sign up for the dragooned hilarity of the *lederhosen* and Austrian arse-slapping evening. He had business with the mountain, and three demons to face. Four if you counted whisky.

But Caitlin trapped him later that evening sitting in smoky solitude at the bar on a high stool. "You missed our welcome event!" she said brightly.

"What a shame for me." He raised his glass and drained it.

"Wouldn't you care to know about the trips?"

"Care?"

"Visits. Excursions. Fun nights."

"No more than I'd care to invite a burly Austrian village farrier to insert heated irons in the delicate, conch-like cavity of my ring-piece."

Caitlin laughed prettily and wagged a finger. "You're being funny! Are you being funny?"

"Am I?"

"What about Xmas day?" She actually said *exmas*. "You must sign up for Xmas day. Dinner. Candles. Party hats. Surely you want company on Xmas day?" Silence. Caitlin made a nervous timpani drumming motion on the bar before her. "Got to go. I'll save you a place anyway."

"Why?"

"Bye-ee!"

Hell, Angus thought, why does everyone think I'm joking?

A couple Angus recognised from his coach took her place, pressing their bellies against the bar. They wore bib-salopettes and matching sweaters, even though they'd arrived too late for skiing that day. They must have raced each other into the things. Angus displaced his loathing with a passionate suck on his cigarette, looking them over to see if they had the shadow on them. He wondered if one day he would be able to tell. The man smiled genially. "Evenin'!"

Angus retired to his room, where his balcony glared over the piste. He knew it was out there. Wax-like snow gleamed supernaturally and the firs probed fingers of

shadow down the incline. He gazed into the snow for a long time, finishing the scotch before finding himself weeping.

"Ski school? You signed up for ski school?" That Caitlin again, a pink fluorescence swishing alongside on luminous yellow Atomic sticks: neat parallel stop, pert bottom, day-glo sweatband, mirror shades. White teeth outdazzling the snow, lips moist with balm.

Angus, feeling he'd been hard the night before, smiled back, conciliatory. "I don't need school."

"Don't we love ourselves!" And she was gone, tracking down to a group of her charges hanging round the nursery slope in pristine salopettes.

That wasn't what Angus meant. Even though he hadn't strapped on the sticks in almost seven years, he was a technically advanced skier. Cairngorms almost every winter week-end as a child; by nineteen a graduated ski-bum in the trans-border Alpine resorts, realizing that the casual sex and the tractable deals went to the boys in the authorized red coats. Settling for a village in the Austrian Tyrol, he found qualifications tough; not the skiing but the theoretical exams, which had to be studied and passed in the indigenous tongue. He worked hard on his German; burned oil. At twenty-two he was given the pretty red suit plus a totemic first-aid kit in a bum-bag.

Then downhill racing in a big way. But one fine sunny morning in a qualifying heat, skis chattering over the ice, tears squeezing from his eyes even behind goggles, a hand reached out of the snow and grabbed his ski. His cruciate ligament popped like a rubber band and his racing days were over.

After that he met Maria, a local girl, also a ski-teacher. He stopped chasing female tourists and they got a house together. Maria it was who suggested he was good enough to teach the teachers. He was almost thirty years old, and this was the nearest thing to taking his work, and his life, seriously.

On the morning before his instructor's examination he rose early to loosen up; nothing better than getting the snow before anyone else. At that time of the morning waxed skis don't cut virgin snow, they kiss it, and the snow whispers back. At a precise speed a ski will aquaplane, barely contacting the snow at all. It was the nearest you could get to flying. Skis sang, the snow blushed pink at the morning light, and the curve of the off-piste slope was erogenous.

Then he saw his first.

He'd carved a track under the pylons of a chair-lift. The metal chairs hung motionless and frozen against the blue sky, but as he flashed beneath he saw a bundle in one of the seats. Expert double turn, skid to a halt, spin 180 degrees to face back the way you've come. But then a gasp of surprise. There was a skier, sitting in the motionless chair, looking down at him.

The morning sun was rising behind the skier. Angus could see only a silhouette, about twelve feet in the air. He removed his goggles to get a better look. "Howdy!"

A breeze picked up off the snow-laden firs and the chair swayed slightly, the airborne skier's sticks scratching together. His posture was odd. He had a bad weight in the chair. Angus called to him again. The skier only peered hard back at Angus through frost-

crusted goggles. Angus took in the pallor of the skier's face, the stiffness of the ski-suit, and at last understood what he'd got up there in the chair.

There was an enquiry. Questions were asked. The rules had been meticulously observed by the lift operators. The chair after the last skier on the lift each day was flagged, and as it came off it was logged. There was no error. The dead skier, a young Englishman from Leeds on holiday with a group of male friends, was last seen in the bar known as The Cow Shed. Inebriated, concluded the enquiry, he'd tried to ski down some difficult off-piste terrain, changed his mind and hitched a ride on the descending chairlift. There was a place just below The Cow Shed, experts pointed out, where the chair came low enough to be grabbed. From there the ride was still over a kilometre long. It was likely the man had fallen asleep in the chair.

Shaken, Angus proceeded with his test, and his sympathetic examiners passed him. Franz, hair the colour of tarnished chrome and skin like orange peel, was the seventy-year old head of the school. He welcomed Angus to the rank of instructor-trainer and tapped the younger man gently on his shoulder. "Ya," he said quietly, and in English. "The mountain eats people."

Angus watched Caitlin joking with her clients, shook his head and made for the chairlift. He was whisked up the mountain in a chair with two German tourists, one of whom offered him a nip from a flask. He accepted.

He spent the morning on the marked pistes, Red runs, Black runs. But the skiing came back easily and they held no challenge. He had to get up high and off piste for what he'd come to do. He looked up the mountain. The top of the horn shone like stainless-steel in the sun. But behind it gathered a cloaking cloud, dark, snow-bearing. There he could ski the glacier. Physically it presented no difficulties.

But someone else was up there. Someone was always up there. Maybe it was Maria. Maybe the others. He could stay on the piste with the leisure skiers in their multi-coloured gear, in their new salopettes and their shocking-pink skis. Or. But he knew if he went up top they would want to talk to him. Softly at first, in a low whisper, but then with increasing savagery, and the slopes would open like a maw and the sky would spin, and the roaring wouldn't stop until he came down again.

At the end of the day he saw Caitlin upended at the bottom of a Black run. Freed of her duties she was getting in some practice. He skidded to a halt beside her.

"Don't say anything!"

"I wasn't going to," Angus said.

"You could at least help me up."

He did. She grabbed his arm and in doing so her glove brushed a little bell pinned to the breast of his jacket. It tinkled. She took her sunglasses off and looked at him. "Saw you earlier. You really can ski, can't you?"

"A bit."

"A bit? More than a bit." She swiped at his little brass bell with her glove, teasing. It tinkled again. "How sweet!"

"My wife gave it to me."

"Where is your wife?"

He glanced up at the horn of the mountain; though he tried not to, the reflex beat him. "She's not here. I mean, she's dead. She gave me this bell."

"Oh."

Caitlin looked as though she wanted to cut off her own hand for having pawed at his memories. They stood silently, uselessly in the snow at the foot of the run, the temperature plummeting around them. "Cowing hell," she said.

Over a beer he told her. A year after becoming an instructor-trainer he married Maria in a Tyrolean church ceremony. Devoted to Maria, too much in love with the mountains, he was never going back to England. Ski

tourism was booming and the school was looking to develop. They'd commissioned a helicopter to take experienced skiers way above the ski lifts and onto unprepared slopes. Angus and Maria took on the job of locating suitable places where the helicopter could hover a few feet from the ground before dropping the skiers. It was a lot of fun.

Together they settled three or four specific sites. They would ski the virgin snow, forming geometric tracks just for the draughtsman's pleasure of looking back and arguing about who was a few centimetres out in their left swing. Maria bought him the bell to counter what they called "the little death". While swooping across vast undifferentiated snowy terrain, without the need to deviate or turn, it was possible for confident skiers to be so relaxed that for a few moments they would enter a hypnogogic state; a zone in which consciousness was whited out. You could come-to having covered a space of a few hundred metres without even being aware of it. Cool, but dangerous, they agreed. The tinkling bell snapped you out of the little death. He bought



Illustration by Dominic Harman



one for Maria, in return.

With the season about to gear up, they went to flag the locations again. The helicopter nosed at a great flat expanse of snow like a bee at a lily. An overnight dump had obliterated their first markers, re-ordering the landscape. As the helicopter hovered, both Angus and Maria grabbed new sets of marker poles and made to jump out, colliding with each other in their enthusiasm to get out onto the erotic white. Angus remembered his manners. "Ladies first."

Maria smiled and flicked his brass bell. The helicopter was just three feet from the ground. She jumped out and was swallowed by the snow. A black hole gaped like a bruised mouth. Maria had dropped straight through. The new snow had made a soft bridge over a chasm, insubstantial as cloud. Angus hung out of the doors of the helicopter, his face a distorted gargoyle, gazing three hundred feet down the sheer side of the newly exposed crevasse.

That evening when he came down to dinner, Angus knew by the stares and the whispers that Caitlin had told the other holiday-makers. He confronted her after the meal. "You told them."

"I only mentioned it to one man," she stammered. It was true. But stories like that made the holiday-makers' skis run faster. Desperately she tried, "It's Austrian party night. Join us."

"I'll pass."

The next day he was determined to go up top, but heavy snow had been dumped overnight. In the morning he noticed the frozen fountains had melted slightly. The conditions signalled avalanche danger, so he decided not to go up after all. Another day was spent regaining technique.

After Maria he thought there was no way back. He left Austria without completing the season; returned to London, where he worked for a summer selling shoes. Then he wrote to Franz and asked if he could return to his old job. Franz was overjoyed to have him back on the payroll.

But when he got back he found Franz in serious ill health. Suffering from prostate cancer, the old man passed away before the season started, and the school was taken over by a younger man called Thomas; a jolly man, a hard drinker, and someone who didn't respect the mountain as much as had Franz. Thomas developed elite skiing, taking small parties of wealthy clients off-piste onto stretches of virgin snow. Angus only once made the mistake of arguing the point with Thomas over schnapps at the end of one working day. "They're not up to it!" Angus said. "They only want to be there so they don't have to ski with the hoi-polloi!"

"So what?"

"They don't have the experience and they don't have the skill!"

"But they have the fucking money, Angus. *Bis du dorf?*"

And Angus it was who ended up escorting celebrity or business groups down the undeveloped shoulders of the Tyrol so that they could go home barrel-chested with stories of mountain daring. One morning, after heavy dumps of snow overnight, the sun was warm and bright in the sky, and the avalanche danger was obvi-

ous. Thomas agreed, though they had a VIP group booked in for that morning. "They'll be detonating avalanches on the usual slopes," said Thomas. "I suggest you take the group over the back."

"Franz recommended keeping away from the back. How about the south-west face?"

"Franz wasn't from this village. I know that slope. The snow doesn't drift up there. Anyway if you take them on the west side they'll be cold and shivering and pissed off and they won't have a good time. You want me to do it instead?"

No, Angus didn't want Thomas to do it. He took the Anglo-American party, of nine men and three women, himself. But he wasn't happy. The group were raucous, lacked focus, failed to take instruction seriously. They were skiing at the edge of their competence. A lot of time on the mountain was spent waiting for people to clamber back into their skis or dust themselves down after a spectacular white-out. From across the mountain came the dull, explosive crump of a controlled avalanche being touched off.

They reached a vast wide apron of snow on an upper slope. It was like the morning of Creation. Untouched by the sun the snow was caked, icy and unyielding. The gradient was steep and a light mist began to descend. One or two of the more accomplished skiers went for the fall-line but hit hidden rocks and crashed early. The confidence of the group was easily shaken. Angus was going to have to guide them across very long traverse runs to get them down safely. He told them to follow him. By now they were all listening. They began the long traverse.

Angus shouted at the skier in file behind him to instruct those along the line to take slightly different tracks. Either he failed to communicate properly or they were afraid, and every person in the party allowed their skis to run exactly in the tracks carved by Angus up front. Perhaps Angus should have spotted this; but he was already out of patience with his group.

They made five traverses across the wide apron, and as the gradient began to level out, the skiers confidence returned. They began to find their own routes or hit the fall-line, going for speed. Some of them got to the bottom before Angus. When he arrived they were joking and laughing again, these men and women who twenty minutes earlier had been frightened children. Angus waited while the last and least able of the party cruised in behind them, skidded to a halt and fell on his butt. Everyone laughed. Then the pratfaller jumped up, shook a fist at the mountain and let out a mighty, high-pitched cowboy yell. "Yip! Yip! Yeeeeeee-hah!"

The delirious shriek echoed back. "Don't do that here, please," Angus said sternly.

"Why not?" said the cowboy.

Angus didn't get the chance to explain. A kind of groan, an exhalation of icy breath, issued from above. Then a rumble, like furniture shifted in an apartment overhead; and again a sigh, but this time the suspiration turned into a rushing and the snow behind them climbed like a geyser.

"Follow me exactly!" Angus bellowed. He slipped sideways on a gentle traverse, beckoning them after him. He was trying to lead them laterally off the slope to beat the width of the onrushing snow. Some of the party

panicked and skied instead down the fall-line, trying to out-run the avalanche. Angus screamed at those who had followed his lead, keeping them in line. The head of the avalanche, now just a few meters behind, crested, reared, and Angus looked back to see a long white writhing tongue of snow uncoil and lash at the backs of the fleeing skiers.

The main body of the sliding snow missed Angus and half of the party, taking up those who tried to outrun its direct path, lifting them, snapping their necks, smashing their bodies on the boulders of the slope. A second wave, like outstretched wings at the flank of the cascade, collected up Angus and the others, spinning them, battering them down the slope. Angus felt his ski bindings pop, first one then the other. He tried to swim upwards through the force of the snow. At last he came to rest, pushing out a cavity breather-hole in front of his face.

He was buried, unable to move, and with no sense of up or down. He lay in the snow for a very long time. Managing to get his arm free in the tiny cavity in front of his face and chest, he called out at intervals, hoping a rescue team would arrive. Eventually, exhausted and without oxygen, all he could do was flick pathetically at the tiny brass bell pinned to his jacket. He passed out.

He came-to bouncing down the slope on a ski stretcher. At first he thought he was still in the grip of the avalanche and he cried out. But he recognized two colleagues from the school towing the stretcher down the mountain. The rescue team had heard Angus's bell while searching. They dug four other members of the party out alive, each of whom had tried to follow Angus to safety. The others were all dead. Three bodies would not be recovered until the spring thaw.

The survivors testified that Angus had saved their lives. But Angus crucified himself: he should have argued with Thomas about taking the group there; he should have warned them about carving out a slab of snow in the long traverse; he should have expressly forbidden them to shout while on the mountain. It was more bad luck than anyone should endure. He should never have tried to make peace with the mountain after Maria had died.

When he recovered, he went back to England all over again.

"Every time I see you, you're looking up the mountain." Caitlin again, on the third day, in a full-spectrum luminous suit. She'd found him sitting outside a log cabin restaurant drinking beer. "It's as though you're watching for something."

"I want to get up there. But today it's covered in fog. Now I'm starting to wonder if I'm just finding excuses."

"I'm sorry about the other night. About your wife. I just blurted it out."

He took a hard swallow of his beer, shrugged as if it didn't matter. She sat down, and said, "Would you take me up there?"

"No. Why do you want to go?"

She thought for a moment. "New experience."

"Try snowboarding."

"Tried it. For teenyboppers. Anyway, the experience I want is with someone *with* experience."

He turned to look at her, but his mirror shades met her mirror shades. "You don't want my kind of experience. I'm a jinx."

"I'm sure that's not true."

"Do you like being a rep?"

She accepted the desperate change of subject. "No. Thought I would. But I don't like pretending to be nice all the time."

"But it's nice to be nice."

She took off her shades and lit a cigarette, blew grey smoke into the clean Alpine air. She had eyes like Welsh slate.

"You're a sardonic fuck so you are. Going up today?"

He looked at the brooding cloud nestled around the horn. It was like a smoking volcano. His stare frightened her.

Instead she persuaded him to ski a few runs with her, and truth was he was glad of her company, relieved to escape from the bleakness of his own mood. She dragged a few tips out of him. He demonstrated a couple of cool turns, the Tele-

mark swing. Then he caught himself enjoying the afternoon, so he stopped showing off. He led her off-piste and down a moderately difficult track between sunlit spruce and the fir. She coped well. They stopped and rested between the trees, sharing her last cigarette.

"Toboggan evening," she said at last. "Tonight. Coming?" "Nah."

But he did go. He didn't get to see much of Caitlin because she was busy organizing the event. He got paired with a fat, matronly Birmingham woman called Sue who shrieked and screamed and shouted "Urtling into the unknown!" in his ear. She held him tight round the waist. Her laughter was infectious and she squeezed warmth into him. For the second time that day he was arrested in the act of enjoying himself. Caitlin caught up with him briefly to say that she'd booked him a seat at the Christmas dinner, and that she wouldn't take no for an answer, and that the reserved seat was next to her.

The following day was Christmas Eve. Holidaying





Austrians were out on the slopes in fancy dress. Many were masked. Harlequins executed ballet turns; Pierrots demonstrated star-jumps; Santas drifted down the nursery slopes backwards. Up on the horn the fog still glowered back at him. Another day missed. He avoided the slopes, unable to stomach the festival bonhomie. Outside the hotel the coloured fountains were melting. Matronly Sue from Birmingham invited him to take a sauna 'with the girls'. "We promise not to look," she said. He declined, went to his room with a bottle of scotch and a pack of cards and played clock patience.

That evening the hotel was decked with hundreds of candles. Carols were piped into the dining room. Caitlin wasn't around. It was her night off.

Strolling in the village he passed the open doors of a Catholic church. Candles flickered within, radiating a dull orange glow to light the snow on the church steps. He went inside and sat for a while. Eventually people began taking their places for the Christmas Eve mass. He got up to leave, but not before lighting a candle for Maria. He wasn't a believer, but she had been. Outside, the snow started to fall again.

On Christmas day evening he took his place at the table next to Caitlin. Sue from Birmingham, unable to find any mistletoe, came round with a balloon instead and insisted on a kiss. Angus obliged. "There you are," she said. "My friends call you sourpuss, but you ain't are you?" Caitlin blew a streamer in his face before he could find an answer sour enough.

"You didn't get up today?" Caitlin asked.

"Limited skiing because of the holiday. The weather was fine but I couldn't charter the helicopter."

"Tomorrow's your last chance."

He didn't need reminding. If the weather was poor on the morrow his trip would have been wasted. He tried not to think about it. Instead he took the local wine at a clip. Caitlin he noticed kept abreast of his drinking. "Don't follow me down *this* mountain," he warned her, but she laughed, too heartily, and refilled her own glass.

Afterwards she led him and some of the others to a pretty Tyrolean bar where Caitlin collared some Welsh people. They drank schnapps and sang Christmas carols. The Welsh contingent were for real, choristers at home, and their soaring voices blazed an island against the cold outside. It was during the singing he felt an uncharacteristic fluid gathering around the retina, but he managed to save himself by calling in another round. They were so drunk they had to hold each other up on the way back to the hotel, and Caitlin it was who ensured she was partnered with Angus, tottering, slipping on the ice. The others peeled away. Caitlin stopped him and said, "Fighting. All the time. Never seen anyone fighting so hard."

"Who are you talking about?"

"Listen, man. Don't get me wrong. It's Christmas. I want someone to hold onto me tonight. Not for sex. I can't be bothered with that any more. Just to hold me. What do you say? It's Christmas."

And then Angus sobered a little, and wondered what it was exactly Caitlin was running from, or who had hurt her. They went back to her room, and they undressed clumsily. Caitlin put out the light and opened her curtains, so that they could look out on the

holy illumination of the snow and the stars. "God you're freezing!" she exclaimed as she bumped her bottom into his groin. He held her as they watched the night, and he felt a transforming warmth passing from her to him.

In the morning he dressed quickly. She blinked, raising herself on her elbows. He put a finger to his lips and kissed her lightly before slipping out of the door. The weather was clear enough around the chairlifts but a louring mist still settled on the horn. He collected his skis and made his way across the village.

Two hours later he was in a helicopter hovering a couple of metres above the wedding-cake terrain, ready to slip out. He hesitated. "It's OK," the pilot shouted. "It's safe." Angus looked back. Though he didn't know the man, the pilot obviously knew Angus. "Don't wait around. That mist is rising and falling all the time."

Angus gave the thumbs up, and dropped from the helicopter. His skis impacted on deep snow with a satisfying thud, and the helicopter was out of there in seconds. Heavy mist coiled below him, choking the horn like a tight collar. He couldn't see through it to the lower slopes. Were he able to ski the fall line, he figured he might be back in the resort in well under two hours. But he knew he had to work round the mountain to get down, and that it would take twice that time; perhaps longer.

The first couple of hundred metres demanded extreme skiing, tracking between deep drifts and craggy brown sedimentary rocks like rotten molars. He had no time to fear. But then he passed into a vast white basin of easy skiing and with the snow hosing out behind him, a hyperventilation came from nowhere. He had to stop to look back, check there was nothing on his tail. He waited, perspiring heavily, breathing hard, straining to hear beyond the glacial silence, appalled by the neutrality of colossal white space.

Beneath his feet he sensed vibration. Not the tremor of an avalanche, but a vibration like an engine pumping at the heart of the mountain, a cruel but dispassionate machine-abacus, pointlessly counting and recounting souls claimed from one millennium to the next. You could not outrun it. You could not side-step it. You could only ride its surface, like a tick on a sheep, hoping to go unnoticed in the fleece.

His breathing steadied and he dropped into the zone of nacreous mist. Fog held no particular fear: he was a good intuitive skier, trusting the eye to take in more than the brain. And though it took him longer than expected to traverse through the mist, he was almost disappointed by the lack of challenge it had offered when he emerged from the zone.

He continued to make wide traverses across the mountain. Two or three times he stopped and looked back, spooked, thinking he'd heard the swish of other skiers gliding at his back. It was the sound of his own ski tails carving the crust. Then, as he relaxed into his trajectory, the little deaths descended. The bell on his jacket tinkled, or a ski tail flapped, and he would come back to consciousness, pull up sharp and look up the mountain at his parallel tracks.

The sun was behind him. His shadow was short and distinct, cut by template. The middle of the day was approaching when he dropped into a lonely valley of

eerie stillness.

At the bottom of the valley nestled a log building. There were people outside and skis were propped upright in the snow. He was surprised, in this undeveloped flank of the mountain, to find a mountain restaurant. He surveyed the adjacent peaks to see where the chairlift terminated, but there was none. He couldn't figure where all the casual skiers had come from.

He tucked, letting his skis run in a *schusz* to the bottom of the lonely valley. By the time he'd climbed out of his bindings almost all of the other skiers had gone inside. He stood his sticks and skis upright next to an interesting obsolete set and followed them in.

The restaurant was full and there was a party going on. All looked friendly and relaxed. Some were singing and laughing. Everyone was drinking out of Styrofoam cups: a wine or punch of a synthetic purple colour. Angus had seen some spilled on the snow outside the door. A man handed him a Styrofoam cup. Angus sniffed it, tasted it. It was slightly saline. He quietly parked his cup on a table and pushed through to the service queue.

The holiday-makers were conversing loudly in a language Angus didn't understand, maybe a dialect of German. They could have been Eastern European: certainly their ski suits and some of the equipment outside looked dated, like gear he'd seen in Polish or Bulgarian resorts. Some of them were eating an unappetizing grey substance from paper plates. He sensed they were discussing the rolling mist from which Angus had just descended. They seemed animated and concerned.

Someone shouted, and everybody quietly left their food and their drink, moving outside to put on their skis. Amongst the stragglers a man looked at Angus, tapped his wristwatch and made a gesture suggesting Angus ought to think about going. About to ask a question, Angus saw a woman descending the stairs leading to the restaurant toilets, her boots clumping noisily on the brick tile, a little bell tinkling as she made her way down the steps. She looked uncannily familiar.

"Maria?" he called. "Maria?"

The woman, with her back to him, held up an arm in acknowledgement, the kind of gesture which says, I'll be just a moment. Angus clumped across the now empty restaurant floor to pursue her down the steps. He pulled up short of following the woman into the ladies. After all, he'd only seen her from the back; and

after all, every third woman around these parts was called Maria; and after all...

He waited until it was apparent no-one was coming out. He put his head round the door and called. Then he checked the cubicles. Empty.

Outside the skiers ascended the hill, carrying skis on their shoulders or side-stepping awkwardly. They'd already made two hundred metres, walking into the unrolling mist rather than away from it. Angus followed.

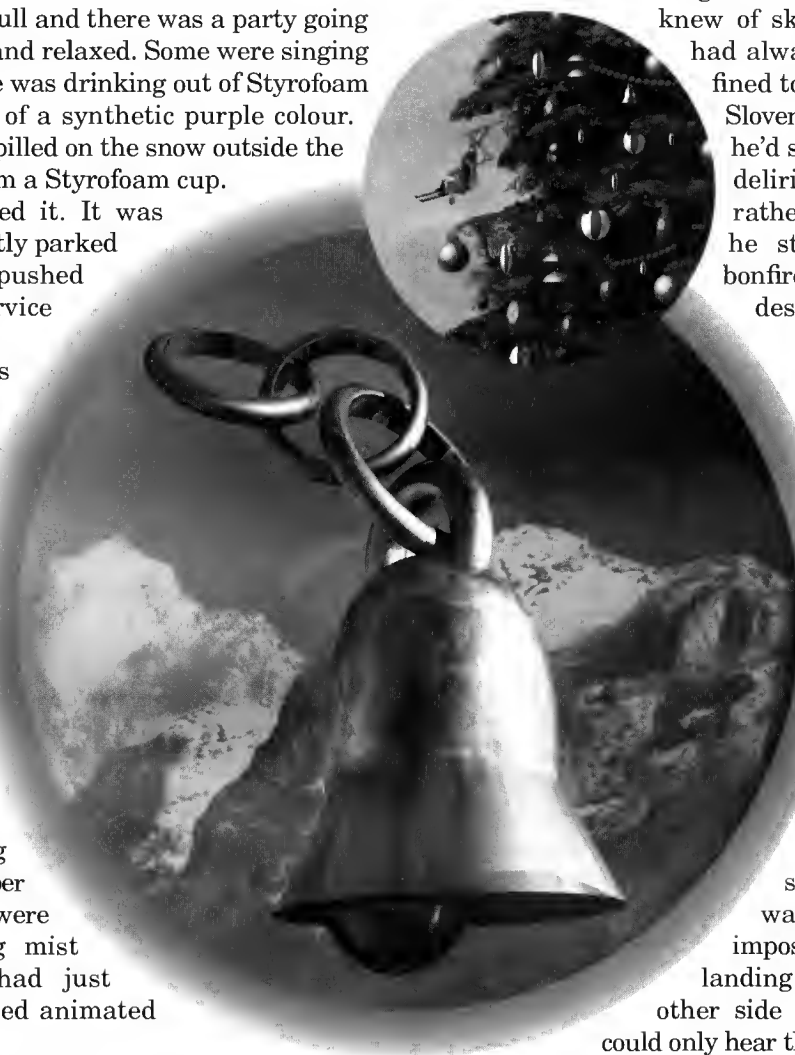
The main body of the revellers made a pile of their sticks and skis. Angus could see them squirting fuel over the equipment. Flames burst high into the air, reflecting amber on the snow. Angus knew of ski-burning rituals, but had always thought them confined to regions of Serbia and Slovenia. It was the first time he'd seen one. But the air of delirious gaiety disquieted rather than cheered him. As he struggled towards the bonfire, the mist continued to descend.

Some of the men were leaping the flames. It was a dangerous game, since many were clearly drunk. But one after another skipped up to the blazing pyre and hurled themselves through the flames and onto the soft snow beyond. A woman egged Angus on to try his luck. He shook his head, and she shrugged. The mist was now so thick it was impossible to see the leapers landing on the snow on the other side of the bonfire. Angus could only hear their cheers as each new chancer made a successful leap.

Then the cheers died, and Angus found himself alone on the slope in the thick mist. He could see the flames guttering, and the charred wood; but beyond that nothing. He listened. All he could hear was the crackle of burning skis and the hiss of melting snow. He sensed an avid expectation from the other side of the flames, as though people were waiting for him, the last one, to make the leap. Instead he walked round the edge of the bonfire. But there was no-one there.

He was alone on the mountain.

Skiing quickly back down to the restaurant and going inside, he tried to hail the staff. Though there came a muffled thumping from the kitchen, no-one answered his call. He felt profoundly cold. The mist had brought an icy drop in the temperature, and his fingers were seizing. He buttoned his jacket, knowing he had to get moving.





It took him another two hours to get back to the resort, skiing, walking and skiing. Emerging from the fog he was relieved to burst onto a sunlit slope, snow flaring under the brilliant light. He didn't know how long he'd spent in the lonely valley, but now his shadow was long and spindly, reaching way down the slope.

Pausing for breath, he was suddenly aware of the shadows of dozens of other skiers waiting behind him. He spun round, but the slope was empty. He told himself it was trick of the light, a tree line from another mountain projecting the shadows of the pines. He checked his pocket for the chip of charred wood he'd taken from the burning pyre.

"You finally got up there then?" Caitlin, in the bar that night. She came checking everyone's departure times. Afterwards she joined him at the bar for a farewell drink.

"Let me pay," she said. "You'll never know how much of a help you were to me last night."

"Me? I didn't do anything!"

"Like I said: you'll never know."

Angus could only guess at what she was talking about. Then she wanted to know about what happened up the mountain, and he told her everything except about the lonely valley.

"I've got something for you," he said. "It's been lucky for me. Maybe it will get you through the season." It was the brass bell from his jacket.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes." He had a new talisman.

She was impressed. "I'll look after it. Really I will."

They kissed and said goodnight, because Caitlin had an early start in the morning. Then they remembered to exchange addresses, even though both of them knew they were unlikely to write.

In the morning he carried his suitcase down to the coach. Caitlin had escorted a different coach to the airport for an earlier flight. It was a warm sunny day and the sky was blue and cloudless. As he sat waiting to depart he noticed that the three coloured fountains were still thawing. He knew that they would thaw, refreeze and thaw again before the season was over. As the bus pulled out of the resort he glanced up at the mountain horn. It flashed in the early morning sunlight.

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**Graham Joyce** challenged me to a game of snooker at a party last year. As a result, I went away and read the novels he had published that had been piling up unread since *Dreamside*, and discovered that he has turned into one of our finest writers of supernatural fiction. So he seemed a natural to ask for a ghost story for Christmas, and the above is the result. Graham lives in Leicester with his wife and new baby. We still have not had our game of snooker. **PB**

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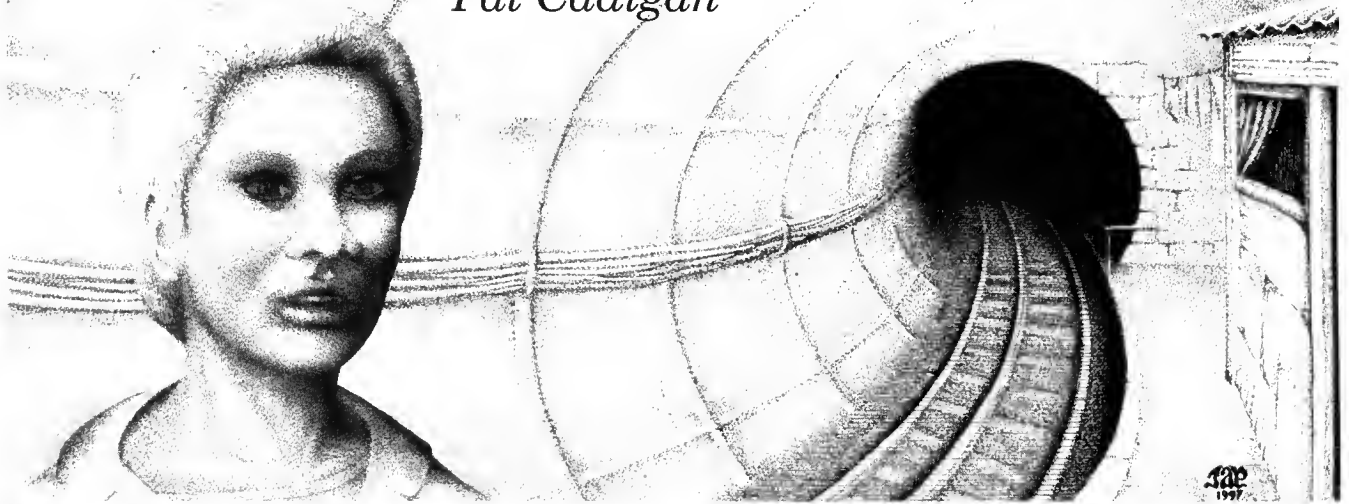
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# What I got for CHRISTMAS

Pat Cadigan



Illustrations by Jim Porter

**M**y parents spent the 1980s in lower Manhattan, the 1990s in the Pacific Northwest, and then saw in the early years of the millennium home-steading an abandoned London tube station with a group of like-minded people so much younger than themselves it was embarrassing. To me, that is, not my parents, which made it all doubly embarrassing. My mother kept calling it the Subterranean Homestead Mews Movement. No one besides my father understood the reference, but at least he had the sense to look sheepish about it.

They did machines along with everyone else, of course. The machines were supposed to help them communicate better, but you could see how well that worked just by checking my mother. It seemed like all any of them did was argue over frequencies. Illegal machines tended to drift and had to be re-tuned all the time. Everyone was always talking about how high it would be if they could get hold of the Hong Kong machines instead of cooking their own. Hong Kong machines were reputed to be all wool and a yard wide, supposedly better than anything you could get in the EU or Scandinavia. Self-repairing, self-replicating, steady as a rock, and kept brain tissue fresh and healthy, yak, yak, yak. I expected to start hearing assertions about levitation and invisibility as well, but nobody went any further than the usual claims of spontaneous telepathy – broadcast and reception beyond machine frequencies. Everybody in the tube station seemed to buy that one. I didn't wonder how they could believe such bullshit – I'd been watching my parents do the do for all of my seventeen years and I knew about kindred spirits. But I did wonder why the idea didn't scare them all shitless.

"Because," said Elmunda patiently, forking up a portion of pilchards in tomato sauce direct from the can, "it's just thought-sharing, only in a quicker and more efficient way. We share our thoughts all the time, you know. It's called talking. You don't have any reason to be afraid of that, do you?"

Elmunda was only a few years old than I was and a few more years prettier, with short, fluffy blonde hair.

The hair was machine-made, of course. Cosmetic machines were *de rigueur*, which I thought was just another good reason not to use them. She hadn't messed with her own skin, though; anyone could see the near-ebony tone was all hers. Her parents had come from Johannesburg, which she called 'Jo-burg'. I'd told her that Elmunda didn't sound especially African to me. She told me that it had originally been Imelda (which wasn't any more African, in fact) but some drunk had called her 'Elmunda' and then claimed he'd been calling her 'the world'. With her encouragement, the name had stuck. She'd liked the idea of being called the world. She was sort of worldly, but only sort of. Or maybe it was just that her world was actually very small.

"I don't want the entire contents of my mind available for sharing," I said.

"But most people wouldn't bother accessing all of it. When you go to a really big store, you don't look at every single thing in it, do you?" Elmunda gave me a bright ain't-I-right-now look. "Nobody does. You only look at what you're interested in."

"Yeah, but we're not talking about one customer at a time. We're talking about a crowd, all looking everywhere at once. And haven't you ever heard of that quaint old custom, shopping? Like when you go out to the fresh-air market and just look at everything until you're inspired or expired? Anyway, I don't know about you machine-heads, but I'd go crazy."

"Well, I probably would, too," admitted Elmunda, "but only till I got used to it. It's like traffic." She dabbed tomato sauce off her lips with the cuff of her jacket, managing to look dainty and well bred. "Are you going topside? In the next few minutes, I mean?"

I shrugged. "Might. Might not. Why?"

"I just thought you might be going Christmas shopping. Speaking of stores." She held up the pilchards can, empty now. "If you are, I'd ask you to drop this in the recycling bin."

"Yeah, okay." She wiped the can out with a rag and then squeezed it between her palms. Cans weren't as substantial as they'd been when I was a tyke but you'd still have to have been a lot stronger than Elmunda to



flatten one with only your hands. "Here, give me that," I said. "I'll stomp on it."

"No, I do it this way. It's good for the arms." She winked at me. "And the bust."

I sighed. Dawn of the millennium – well, morning, anyway – and women were still worrying about their breast size. When I'd expressed this to my mother, she had surprised me. Instead of backing me up with some vaguely feminist platitude, she pointed out that since I was rather well endowed in that area, I could have the luxury of forgetting about it completely.

Elmunda managed to collapse the can a fair amount and then handed it to me. "Thanks," I told her, looking it over.

"Oh. Well, you're welcome, then." She gave a short laugh. "Don't say I never gave you a Christmas present."

I looked around. "Maybe we should put up some Christmas lights."

"You Americans. We don't string lights all over the place."

"You will if you get enough of us together over here. We're pushy like that," I said, but Elmunda had begun searching through her duffel bag for something, maybe a book, or maybe just an excuse to be done with me. I moved along the platform, just as I imagined a multitude of urban travellers had done before me. I tried to picture them all in my mind. Not that the underground passenger was extinct. It was just some of the lines that had been closed down, and not even all of those, just the less profitable bits. Farther in toward the center of London, there were trains running on this very line. But when you got out to the areas where rows of empty storefronts marked the places where too many businesses had gone to die, the city had decided it was too expensive to have both buses and subway. Excuse me, tube. So the buses ran out here and before the government could even think of putting together a study-panel to ruminate on the question of what to do about the closed stations, the squatters had moved in (excuse me, homesteaders). My parents had arrived with me in tow just in time to join in.

My mother had apparently been in contact with another machine-head for some time before she and my father had left the cradle of modern caffeinated civilization. Machines were completely illegal in America, banned outright. Which didn't mean you couldn't get them, just that they were obscenely expensive and tended to malfunction so much, they weren't often worth the trouble. In the EU, however, they had become a raving industry, more so in some places than in others. It made the EU very attractive to lotus-eating, tree-hugging, coffee-achieving, aging American children like my parents. And while I spent a lot of time and energy making fun of Peter Pan (my mother) and Wendy (my father), in my less jaded moments, I had to admit that I liked London and the underground homestead stuff a lot better than vegetarian coffee bars. I didn't know anything about lower Manhattan because I'd been too young to remember, but I hoped to god that I'd never have to look at another Marxist tofu head buzzed on breakfast blend and rapping a mile a minute about food co-ops.

If you want to know the truth, I wasn't terribly charitable toward anyone. Especially the Happy Wanderers I'd been born to, I guess. As far as I could tell, the

only thing they really had going for them was that the rest of the world was so much worse. At least they didn't beat me or rape me or sell me for slave labor. Judging from what I'd heard, and witnessed first hand in a few cases, that alone gave them heavy cred in the parent 'hood, as someone I'd once known had put it. Jean had disappeared into the shelter/halfway house system after pausing briefly at the local battered women's refuge in the Pacific Northwest. My father had volunteered me there as part of my home schooling curriculum. My father was a fairly aware kind of person. I didn't really understand how he'd been taken in by the machines bullshit.

Abruptly, I realized I'd been so lost in thought that I had walked all the way down to the end of the platform, as if I were a genuine London commuter hoping to get on the least-crowded car at rush hour. I stood staring at the dark mouth of the tunnel. You weren't supposed to go into the tunnels themselves, reputed to be the haven of rapist-murderers, cannibals, mutants spawned in chemical spills, and other, even worse examples of the poorly socialized. Unbidden, the image came to me: an old-time train crashing through a small gathering of cannibals just about to carve some long pig on a spit. Cannibals and unspeakable kebab went flying, what wasn't pulverized under the wheels.

Well, that was a nice picture to carry in my head. Maybe I really was getting too nasty for my own good. I turned away and saw that my presence had awakened one of the ad spaces on the curved wall across the rails. It wasn't an ad any more – a freelance artist had tossed some home-brew up there. Or studio brew – the story going around was that some slick studio was publicizing its pet house artists as urban guerrilla virtuosos, on the theory that if you couldn't find the next Haring or Basquiat, you could invent some. I didn't think anyone was buying it, myself. And then again, that story might have been another one of those urban legends, real fictions for fake children, and some poor artist was wasting a lot of soul on a world that just couldn't believe in anything any more.

Or maybe someone had just splashed something against the wall and walked away and forgot about it. Within the warped rectangle of the old ad space, nothing coherent was happening, not even anything artistically incoherent. A few vague shapes sort of came together, darkening the filthy, greyed-out blank very slightly, but it was as if the borders that would have defined the shapes couldn't hold. They kept leaking or melting, not really so much re-forming as just... I don't know, writhing. Total waste of machines, I thought, frowning at it. I had no fondness for machines, but waste of any kind really rubbed me the wrong way.

"So what do you think?"

I jumped. The guy had come out of nowhere. Some friend of a friend of my mother's, or rather, the friend's son. Third generation squatter, if you believed him. Zeke the Freak, or the Meek, I could never remember. My mother thought he was good-looking; I didn't have an opinion. He was short and a little bit plump, with the face of a little kid who had just found out something he wasn't supposed to know and couldn't wait to embarrass everyone by telling. His hair was mostly grey but it didn't seem to be by design, just a bit of Nature gone tricky.

"Nothing, really," I said. "It's just a subway platform. I wouldn't care to live here."

"I mean that," he said, gesturing at the big nothing ad space. "It's mine. I mean, I did it. What do you think of it? I really want to know."

"What do I think of what – a few shadows? Do you really think minimalism is worth overdoing in the first place, much less with machines?"

"Oh." Zeke's streaky, freaky face lost almost all expression, going cold. "You're unenhanced. Not a machine-head," he added patiently, in response to my own blank look.

"Oh." I did my best to echo his tone back at him exactly. "You need machines to see that? What's the point?"

"It's twenty-first century techno-impressionism." Pause. "Don't you know anything about art?"

I shrugged. "Impressionism and Van Gogh. I'm really more of a pre-Raf fan myself. 'Flaming June' –"

"Right, right, right. Impressionism, though – your eyes and brain have to work for it."

I shook my head. "Not any more, apparently. It's all done by machines, now."

"Machines are just fancy tools for people with opposable lobes!" he called after me as I walked away.

"Merry Christmas!" I called back.



My theory was that most of the squatters stayed underground once they got there because they didn't want to climb the horribly long and very still escalators to the surface. Personally, I didn't understand why, if they'd gotten the lights working, they couldn't power the escalators as well. Maybe they were afraid that would make it too easy for the bourgeois to come down and play at being weekend homesteaders.

Now, wouldn't that be funny, I thought – a travel agency selling getaways to the real underworld. People like Zeke the Freak could toss machine artwork up on the walls for the glow-in-the-dark horror show, there could be a holo projector array to show the scene with the cannibals and the train – it would outsell the Tower of London ride without raising a sweat. Switch to *A Christmas Carol* for the seasonal trade; didn't the old chestnuts roast best? And if you convinced people they'd see more and better if they were 'enhanced' there was no telling. In six months, the homesteaders would probably have enough to finance a re-opening of the tube lines with new rolling stock.

Well, that was it, of course. Make the show part of the transportation, and vice versa. Ride the London Underground – not for the faint of heart or the weak of stomach.

If only I had been born to an advertizing mogul, I thought as I hauled myself up the unmoving escalator. I know stationary steps are really just stairs, but somehow, there really is a difference between climbing several flights and humping it up a dead escalator. Maybe it's the knowledge that the stairs are supposed to move for you. Machines. Machines, machines everywhere, nor any fit to use – that was another problem with them, I thought, pausing for half a minute in the middle of the escalator to catch my breath before I went on. When our mechanical devices quit working, they were still lying around in the way, where they continued with a dis-

torted, half-assed version of their original purpose. Escalators became long and impossibly steep stairs. Dead double-decker buses became duplexes (yuck). Machines – well, who knew what they would become in the end? Perhaps that was the fun part. Here's another little surprise for us all, courtesy of Life, the Universe, and –

"Santa!" someone yelled and I jumped. A feral urchin, one of the increasing tribe of rootless kids who dart between underground and topside was squatting on a broken entry gate, looking very like a filthy pixie on a toadstool, clapping her hands and giggling. Santa had indeed just put in appearance and was reeling drunkenly around the entrance hall with a large can of ale. He was pretty skinny for Santa; even for a skinny Santa he was skinny, and not very tall, either. Maybe this was actually an elf who had stolen the suit and gone on a bender.

I was amused. I couldn't help it. I wasn't quite as amused as the feral, but ferals laugh at everything. They're little psychos, really, mentally disturbed kids born too late to get any kind of help. They don't last long, usually; someone always ends up killing them, by accident or on purpose, or they kill themselves, directly or indirectly. I had the sudden mad notion of this Santa being out on an elf recruitment drive and the feral was actually trying out for a position in the workshop.

Then Santa staggered around to face me and I saw that this year's model was female. Which was a bit strange, since the full white beard seemed to be genuine.

Santa looked at me defiantly, as if daring me to suggest she needed a shave. After a long moment, she almost fell sideways, caught herself, and lifted her ale in a toast.

"Merry Christmas, luv. You wanna come on over here and sit on Santa's lap and tell me what you want for Christmas?"

I started to fold my arms and then discovered I was still holding the can Elmunda had given me. Before I could even look around for a place to put it, the feral materialized at my left elbow.

"Give it here," she demanded.

"Merry Christmas," I told her, obeying. Her mouth dropped open as if she had never heard anything like that before in her life, and then her dirty face lit up in an incredulous smile. In a way, that was even more disturbing than the whiskers on Ms. Claus; I stared after the kid as she sprinted away with her prize. Had she thought I had actually given her something, or was she new enough at the feral life to remember something like a real Christmas?

Santa fell on my shoulders in a cloud of fumes, embracing me like a long lost reindeer.

"You're American! God bless you, my love, really. God bless. Have a drink. Merry, merry, and ho-ho-ho and all that." She tried to force the can between my lips. I pushed it away, wincing at the touch of metal on my chin.

"Don't. It's not my brand. I gave it up for Lent."

"Advent," Santa corrected me, still hanging around my shoulders by one red arm. Her suit was quite loose; I could feel what a bag of bones she was underneath. But the beard, full, white to the point of pristine, and thickly luxuriant, was most definitely homegrown.

"You're looking at the beard, aren't you? I knew it was a bad idea."

I started to mumble something conciliatory but she was hauling me over to a couple of stray cushions that

might have escaped from someone's discarded couch and come to rest among the dirt and trash on the colorless floor. The world's thinnest Santa was surprisingly strong, shoving me down on the cushions with one arm and then plopping down beside me, without spilling more than a few gulps of ale.

"Yes, I knew it was a bad idea," Santa continued, sprawled next to me with her beard displayed on her chest. It seemed to have gotten longer or fuller or something. "Knew it was a bad idea, but did it anyway, didn't I? Yes, I most certainly did. I did."

She blew out a fragrant breath, then belched. "You know it's tiring, this thing? I mean, literally exhausting, having to grow it and grow it and grow it." She lifted the can, frowned, and then crushed it in her fist. "Empty. Shit." She rolled her head around to look at me.

"Not fair, you know. It's just not fuckin' fair." She flung the can away as hard as she could; it bounced and skipped along the floor and slid out of sight behind one of the entry gates. The metallic noise it made seemed to hang in the air, not like an echo but more like the audio equivalent of a lingering if faint odor. It didn't make any sense when I thought of it, but it certainly felt that way.

"So," she said suddenly, grabbing me by the front of my army surplus jacket. "Whaddayou want for Christmas, eh, chick?"

I tried to pull away but she gripped me harder, bringing her face closer to mine. She was a lot younger than I had first thought, possibly somewhere under thirty.

"Come on, you can tell old Santa. What's the matter, don't you believe I'm Santa? Come on, go ahead, pull the beard, it's real. Swear to fuckin' God, it's the real thing. That makes me the real thing, right? I'm Santa. I'm Santa, uh, Claudia. Yeah. Santa Claudia, ho, ho, fucking ho. Political correctness has come to the North Pole. On Donner, on Vixen, on and on and on and alla that." Santa's hold on my jacket loosened a bit and I pulled my face away from her breath, which promised worse things to come.

"What was I talkin' about – oh, shit, yes. Whaddayou want for Christmas, when you could have anything you wanted just sitting upstairs waiting for –" she broke off, looking confused again. "Is this Fitzrovia?"

"No," I said. "Far from it. I didn't know they were doing female Santas in Fitzrovia this year."

"How far?"

I shrugged. "A couple of miles at least."

"Shit. Merde. Beaucoup merde."

"Yes, but here, you're that much closer to the North Pole."

Santa gave me a yank on the jacket that brought us nose to nose. "Are you some kind of smart-ass bitch that has to make fun of everything?"

"Well," I said weakly.

"Good." She let go of me and brushed at the front of my jacket, as if she really were concerned about the wrinkles. "Had my fill of good little boys and girls, let me tell you, my sweetling. Gonna find out who's naughty and nice, I am, but just so I won't go wasting my time with those little goody-goody fuckers."

"Whatever's right," I said, starting to get up.

"Siddown," Santa said, giving me a hard yank so that I fell face forward over her legs. "Still ain't told me

what you want for Christmas."

It looked more like Santa was going to give me a spanking than a present. I tried to roll off but somehow she pulled me around and got me settled face up. Half her beard went in my eyes and nose and I had to paw it away. I'd been right, I saw; the thing was actively growing at a rate fast enough to see. It had to be eating her alive from the inside out.

She saw the look on my face. "Yeah, sometimes it's better to give than to receive and sometimes it's even a matter of life and death, innit? Tell me what you want for Christmas and you can have it. Then you can run get me some more ale. You might even make it. If you don't, you can drink it yourself."

I flung myself away from her and this time she let me go. I scrambled up and away from her, brushing at my clothes and my face, spitting hard, even though I knew it wouldn't do any good at all. Old reflexes never die; they don't even fade away. They just make you look silly and feel stupid.

Santa watched me through heavy eyes. The beard had grown down past her waist; tendrils flowed down her belly toward her crotch. It wasn't proper beard hair, I realized. Or maybe it was proper beard hair as grown by a woman, who was I to say? I touched my own face. Santa shrugged with one shoulder; then her eyes fell closed.

I stood in the middle of the entry hall unsure what to do next. What I wanted to do was flee down the escalator bawling Mommy! at the top of my lungs and just generally have hysterics, except I'd probably never make her and my father understand what had happened. And I would undoubtedly infect them along with the entire homestead group, and then it would spread through the tunnels to –

I started to cry.



It took a few minutes, but I did get a grip. The traffic noise did it; actually, the sound of buses groaning around the corner of Seven Sisters Road and onto Green Lanes and the high whine of electronic scooters darting in and out of traffic. It was all still up there, still going on normally, which meant that Santa wasn't all that contagious.

Maybe she wasn't even dead. I went over to have a look.

OK, I couldn't be right about everything. Santa was not only dead but already decaying, as the runaway machines made more and more beard for no reason except that it was what they were programmed to do, and they would do it until the raw material for it ran out. Which meant –

Oh, hell. I moved away from the body, scraping my shoes on the floor, as if nano-machines were the sort of thing you could sand off. Then I got a case of the psychosomatic itches and clawed at myself, teetering on the brink of hysteria. This time, however, I went back to normal more quickly. Santa's beard wasn't going to consume the world, I told myself, and part of me wanted to giggle hysterically at the idea. Santa's beard is coming to town; Santa's beard is eating the town. No. Because the machines had to have come from somewhere in the first place, which meant that Santa had to have caught them from someone or something first –

Unless Santa herself was the origin.

I started crying again, but not so hard that I didn't



notice I was on my way out of the tube station. Up on the surface, I didn't even stop to catch my breath or scratch any more psychosomatic itches; I just headed up Green Lanes, as though I had an actual destination in mind.



The grass at the Endymion Road end of Finsbury Park was laid out in swirly green and red stripes. It looked like a guerrilla decorator job rather than anything council-sponsored. When I got closer, I saw I was right – amid the swirly red and green stripes was the sentiment, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, and long live the glorious revolution, whatever it is this time. Along the fence was the usual crop of giant snowdrops with anti-gun slogans dangling from inside the enormous blossoms. This particular strain of doctored flower was apparently even tougher than the Labour Party Rose, but that was all right. There was always something in the news they were appropriate for. I kept moving. Or rather, my feet kept moving, independent of me.

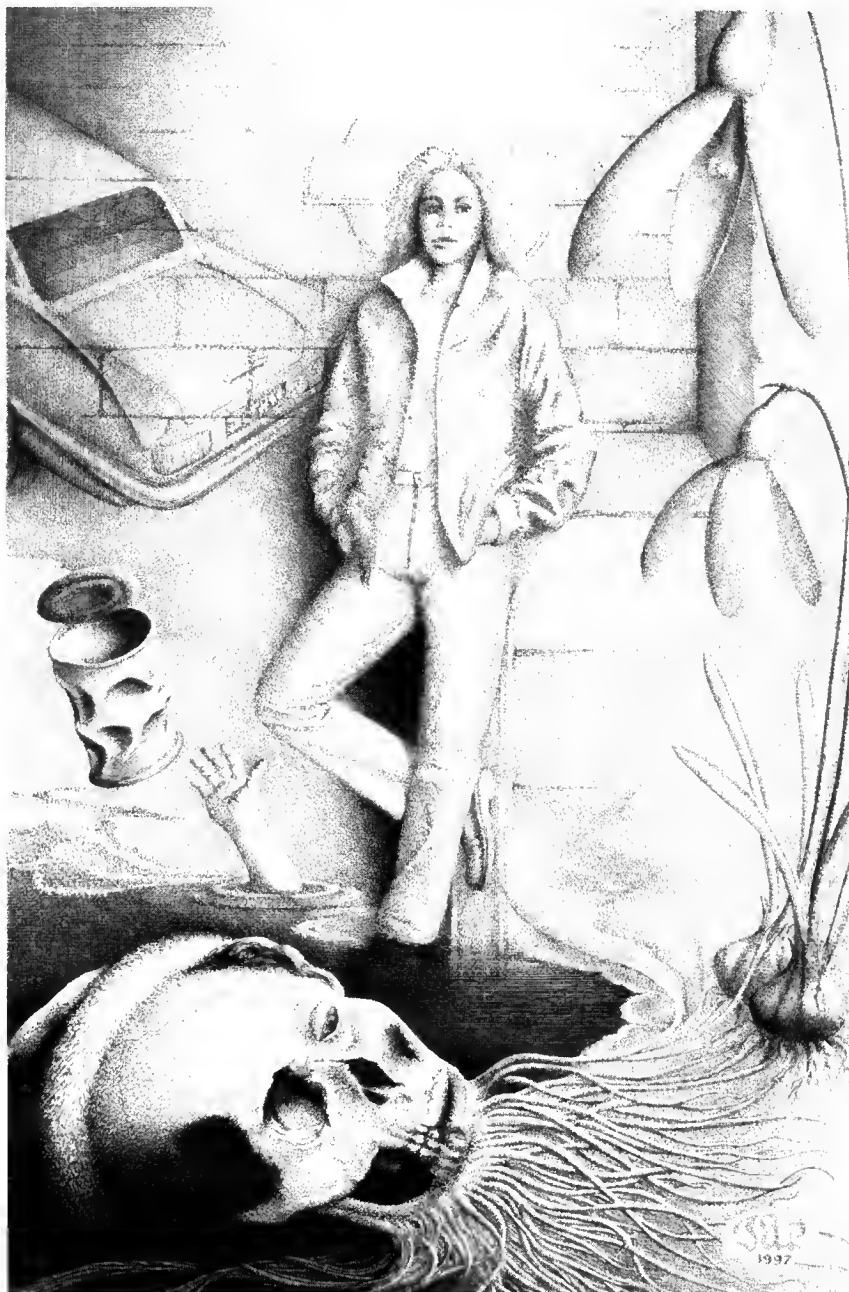
I could have started crying again, but at the same time, I felt beyond tears. The traffic on Green Lanes was the same jumble of buses, subminis, old-style cars converted to electronics, three-wheelers with and without shell-bodies, as well as bicycles, motorcycles, and a contentious local character in a motorized wheelchair weaving through the chaos and frequently banging a fist on some larger thing. A few of the people stuck in the mess looked at me as I marched past. Other than feel my chin for any sign of bristles, all I could do was keep going. People on the sidewalk barely gave me a glance, even when I had to brush past them. None of them knew, of course; I was being hijacked or kidnapped or – something – by a substance, by nano-machines, of all the god-dam things, and none of them knew. Those that did look at me probably thought I was wired up on something ordinary, like heavy methyl or classic coke. I couldn't even look back at them intentionally. It was like being

in a sealed train – the only way I saw them was if they happened to enter my line of sight.

My body carried me past a storefront presenting itself as a members-only club, the windows painted over on the inside in broad strokes of what must have been a bright sea-green at some point, before dust and smoke and nicotine had coated it. The door opened as a man came out, giving me a glimpse of billiard tables under a thick layer of cigar and cigarette smoke floating a foot below the ceiling, and many more men with pool cues,

either standing like palace guards on sentry duty or bent over the tables in classic billiard shooting positions. That didn't interest me as much as the painted-over window. I only had a glance at that as well as I went by, but I could see that the machines were busy, dancing arcane, byzantine designs into the paint. I didn't know what the designs meant, or if they meant anything at all, but I did know that I was the only person on the street who could see them.

Maybe I could see Zeke the Geek's art now, maybe I was in the elite. I tried to picture it but got no feeling one way or the other. Maybe you couldn't second-guess that sort of thing; maybe machine vision has no ret-



spect; or maybe it was actually a case of the emperor's new artform and old Zeke was having a nice private laugh up his sleeve at everyone claiming they could see something other than a few shifting blobs.

Or maybe, I thought suddenly, as I strode past a fruit and vegetable stand where a Kurdish couple were comparing cabbages, the artform was having a good laugh on him, making him think he was seeing art instead of blobs. The idea glowed in my brain like a beacon, giving me the overwhelming sensation of being right, and not just wishing that I were.

There was a bus stop in front of an immaculately painted store called Maqsood's. Well, it would have been

immaculately painted, except that the machines were in a color frenzy, displaying a picture – pattern – message? Whatever it was, I wasn't quite up to understanding it.

Look at it this way, chick – the aimless part of your life is over.

If it had been a voice, it might have been Santa's, with a hint of my own thrown in. But it wasn't a voice, and I didn't hear it, or even feel it.

On the next corner, I got hit by a car.

It was more of a clip, actually; I walked out into the street just a bit before the back end of the vehicle had cleared my path and the rear mini-fin caught me. I didn't have much choice, so I was glad that it didn't seem to hurt that much. Perhaps I'd been lucky, not just in the timing but in the fact that fins had come back into automotive style, as it had kept me from getting so close that the tire would have gone over my foot.

I lay on my back in the middle of the road staring up at the overcast December sky. Maybe it was just windy up there, I thought, watching the clouds roil.

People were gathering around to look down at me, a rosette of shocked, curious faces. I started to get up and a flurry of hands tried to push me down again. It was like being pawed by an enormous organism made of fingers; I could barely distinguish one person from another any more. It wasn't hard to brush them aside and get to my feet. Once I did, I saw that I was facing the wrong way; I could tell by the twinkle of the footprints I'd left on the pavement, there for anyone who could see them. I turned around and walked the other way.

The noise around me faded into normal traffic after a bit. A red double-decker went by; I saw a face in the rear window – not someone I knew, but someone who knew me. The picnic tables at the Thin Green Man pub were crowded with assorted locals who didn't mind doing their drinking outside. Mild winter, after all. A few of them got up as I approached; I knew they were following me as I went past.

The park had been divided into three sections – kids' playground, basketball courts, and the green. I think the sign on the fence said Duckett's Common, which some part of me was still interested in knowing. In the centre of the green, a thick crowd of pigeons were having a banquet. I stopped briefly, looked around, and found them off to my right, in a loose gathering around a bench. Two dogs were asleep on the bench, but they raised their heads alertly as I came near. The people sitting on the ground also looked up. I didn't know them myself, but something in me did.

Crusties, I had heard my mother telling my father,

were a long and honorable tradition, just like squatters or Rastas. Their appearance had held steady for generations, according to her, although someone else had said that crusties hadn't been around quite that long and some Americans made the mistake of thinking that everything in London went back hundreds of years.

Well, I thought, standing over a smiling fellow with long, ratty, ginger dreads, maybe not back hundreds of years, but perhaps forward –

"Santa's dead, isn't she?" he said to me, a little sadly.

I think I nodded. A woman with very short yellow hair moved to his side and studied me with large, Cleopatra-lined eyes. "How do we know this one isn't going to die, too?"

"If she hasn't yet, she won't," he said confidently.

Another guy with mousy brown dreads dangling just above his shoulders looked into my face anxiously. "Wow. You know, I think she's from that bunch up at Manor House. I wouldn't have thought anyone would find a virgin there."

My face must have twitched because the yellow-haired woman covered her mouth for a moment and giggled. "He means *virgin* as in someone who's never done machines, luv. Just in case you was wondering. Then that must be true, right? You never done no machines?"

"She hasn't," said the ginger-haired man. "I can tell by the way

her eyes are. Look. You can see it."

All the other crusties gathered around in front of me so they could see whatever it was he was talking about. They all seemed to agree.

"Well," said mousy-brown dreads with a laugh. "What do we do now, slouch toward Bethlehem?"

Ginger dreads laughed. "Nah, not this time, mate. This time Bethlehem's slouched toward us." He smiled up at me. "Innit, though?" He patted the ground next to him. "Come sit here, love, make yourself comfy. We're gonna be here a while."



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For too long, **Pat Cadigan's** hard-edged heart-felt fiction has been absent from *Interzone*. To present her here for the first time is a great privilege. The pleasure is mine too, but you can have some.

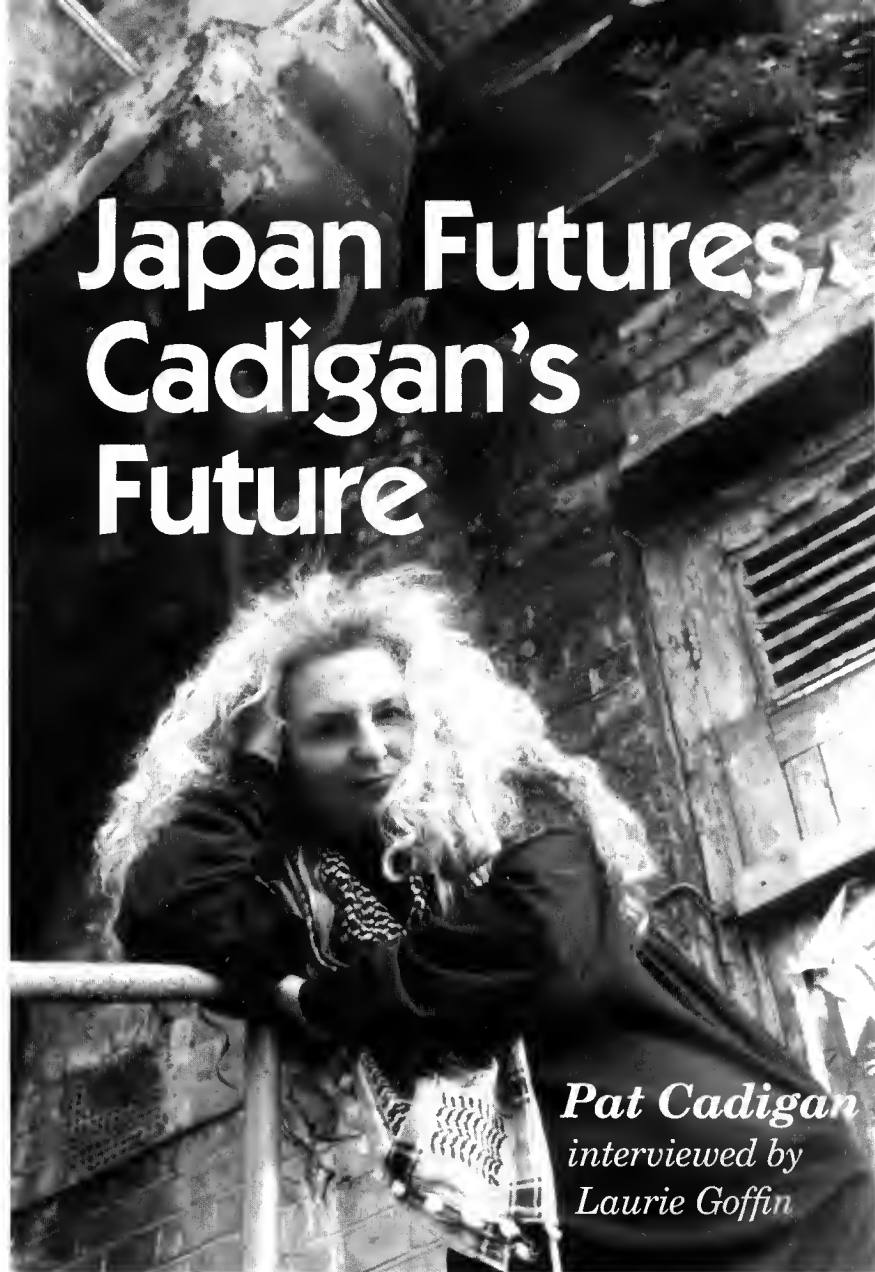


Although Pat Cadigan has been selling her short fiction professionally since 1980, "What I Got for Christmas" is her first story in *Interzone*. It is also her first published story to use as a background her new local area, Haringey in North London. Pat moved there after many years living in Overland Park, a suburb of the greater Kansas City area, in the American Midwest. We thought this would be an appropriate moment to find out more about the writer whom the *Guardian* described as "the Queen of cyberpunk", and BBC TV's *Future Fantastic* called "the Queen of modern science fiction". Laurie Goffin gathered up her notebook, her Sony Walkman Professional and her well-read copies of Pat Cadigan's books, and headed off to Haringey.

When I reach the nearest underground station to Pat Cadigan's home – following the detailed directions she has provided – I experience a frisson of excitement as I get off the train. Paul Brazier has let me see Pat's new story in the Christmas *Interzone*, and I know that the story starts here, on the platform at Manor House tube station. However, everything is normal – or, at least, as normal as London gets these days – and I catch the bus that takes me close to her house without anyone offering to sell me a mindcap. I do look carefully at the new sign outside Maqsood Newsagents, just in case I can see strange patterns, but it's just a regular bright yellow shop sign.

I get off the bus on a busy shopping street – "Watch out for the W Bar and get off after that" say my instructions. "The W Bar?" I think. "So what kind of drinks do they sell there?" I expect to find, after reading Pat's hard-edged, street-smart novels (*Mindplayers*, *Synners*, *Fools*) that she lives in some blasted urban wasteland, filled with screaming sirens and shouting punks. But, in fact, the street where she lives is a quiet tree-lined one, and her home takes up most of an elegant three-storey Edwardian terrace.

I am ushered into Pat's study – which has bookshelves on every possible wall – and settled into an armchair after being greeted by Pat. She looks very different from the author photos on some of her books – where she has a cautious, guarded expression – and seems relaxed and happy. She has changed her hair-style radically since arriving in London – "I'm prematurely blonde," she explains, and then goes on to tell me about a newspaper article she's just read that suggests that women who "go blonde" also "go wild". I position my tape-recorder carefully, just in case. Her husband – "Yes, he's my third husband," admits Pat. "But, hey – this is not a habit. I can quit any time I want" – brings us tea, and I begin with the obvious question: How does Pat Cadigan like living in London?



# Japan Futures, Cadigan's Future

*Pat Cadigan  
interviewed by  
Laurie Goffin*

"I love it here. I feel as if this is where I was always meant to live. It's a good place for a writer to be, because, with New York, it's one of the two centres of the English language publishing industry. Before I moved here, I already knew lots of people in London – writers, editors, publishers, journalists. My friend Kim Newman once told me that I was living in the wrong country, that I had far too much irony to be an American. The first time I visited here, which was for a very short trip in 1989, I was walking around and I knew, I really knew, that London was the place I wanted to live. Of course, I'd been living in Kansas, first in Lawrence (whose most famous resident was William Burroughs), where I completed my degree, and then in the Greater Kansas City area, for over twenty years. Overland Park, where I'd been living with my former husband, and where my son Bob was born and lived until we came here, was a quiet suburb, the kind of place people went to get away from inner city violence and crime. But I think you can tell from reading my fiction, particularly the

novels, or stories like "Angel" or "Pretty Boy Crossover", that I'm really a city person. In fact, I was born in New York, but my mother and I moved when I was young to an industrial town, Fitchburg, in Massachusetts. That's where I grew up and went to school. We didn't have a lot of money, and I went to Roman Catholic girls' schools – it was a way of getting a better education than the usual state schools, without having to pay. Fitchburg was *not* a place where I wanted to stay. I remember walking along the street, when I was about 13 or 14, and thinking 'I have to get out of here', and I knew the only way I was going to do that was to work hard at school, do real well academically, and get a scholarship to go to college. So that's what I did. I got a scholarship to go the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and started out as a theatre major."

Pat met her first husband, Rufus, at Amherst. He secured a teaching appointment at the University of Kansas, in Lawrence, so Pat transferred her credits there and completed her undergraduate course,



ending up with a degree in “general studies, which is kind of a bachelors degree in liberal-arts-I-don’t-know-what-to-do.” Although Lawrence, Kansas was not necessarily where she expected to be, it did have the advantage that James Gunn was teaching an MA in Science Fiction there. Pat had been reading science fiction since she was about eight, and had begun writing her own stories – “I still have some of those ‘novels’ I wrote when I was a kid, notebooks full of stuff” – around the same time. Although the MA was about science fiction, not about the writing of it, both James Gunn and Pat knew she wanted to be a writer. “He always passed around a questionnaire, asking why you’d signed up for the course and what you expected to get out of it, and I remember he would always give the statistics. He’d say: ‘17 of you are fulfilling a core requirement, 18 of you are fulfilling a major requirement, some of you are curious, some of you are interested in science fiction, and one of you wants to write.’ And so I knew that was me.”

Unfortunately, trying to support herself whilst doing the MA proved too much, and Pat dropped out in 1976 after a year – “I was burning out. I was working three jobs and trying to complete a Masters degree, and that’s not a good idea.” One of the those jobs was on a closed circuit radio station for the blind. “We were reading the newspaper and lots of books aloud. We did this because back in the mid-70s they didn’t have books on tape the way they do now. Now it’s an entire industry. Then there was pretty much nothing except for talking books, but there was nothing that current in talking books. I was fascinated to see the difference between reading the newspaper aloud versus reading news that is *written* to be read aloud. This was fascinating to me in the abstract and I really did want to do a study of it. In another life I’m a linguist. In an alternative universe I’m a linguist, and I’m buried up to my ears in Eastern languages.”

So what science fiction were you

reading, from the time you started until you got into the MA programme? I wonder. “I remember the first science fiction paperback book I bought was *View from the Stars* by Walter M Miller Jr, with all those stories in it, and, man! – that had a lot of impact. About the same time I bought an anthology, I believe it was edited by Groff Conklin. I thought Groff Conklin was the beginning and the end, along with Judith Merril. I found Judith Merril’s *Best of the Year* anthologies in the library. Mostly we couldn’t afford to buy books, so I had to make do with 60 cent paperbacks, when they cost 60 cents, and the library. They had a good selection of her anthologies in the library. I’d read these, and I’d think: ‘Oh Jeez, when I grow up I want to be good enough to be in that.’ Then I found *Dangerous Visions* in the library before I even went off to college, and that had a profound effect on me – I was never the same. The landmark works in my life would be, in my early life, *The View from the Stars*, the Heinlein juveniles, I read *Tunnel in the Sky*, and I’d read all the Heinlein juveniles, because they were all in the library. That was my favourite book, my book, I’d re-read that once a month. And then Arthur C Clarke, *Childhood’s End* – what an incredible book! That was where I got the idea that science fiction could be very grown up and a literature besides, because there are riffs that come to me from *Childhood’s End*, subliminally now, that are part of my mental landscape. Then I started looking around for the New Wave, particularly the British New Wave, because I kept reading about *New Worlds* and the New Wave and all this stuff, but I couldn’t find it. I got this feeling: ‘There’s something going on out there. It’s like, I can’t find it, but I can see where it’s been. I can find traces of it, but I can’t find it, I can’t get in touch with it, I gotta *find* it.’ Then I went to college. College bookstores are always very well stocked, and I found one of the reissues of Fred Pohl’s *Star* series. Then I found Jane Gaskell’s *Atlan* books; I remem-

ber reading those when I was a freshman in college and being completely transported by the whole thing. Those were the most lush textured books of prose, it’s like they engaged all five of your senses and maybe a few more that you didn’t think you had. I wanted to write like that, not *like* Jane Gaskell writes, but to be that engaging and that affecting. Harlan Ellison – I don’t think now you can get out of school without being profoundly influenced by Harlan Ellison. Being a very young person I was real angry about everything. The time I was growing up it was a time of great dissatisfaction, anger with everything, and he was the one other person I knew of who was as pissed off about everything as I was. He was mad about the same things for a lot of the same reasons. I found a lot of what Harlan had published up to then, all those stories and everything. Then I found out about *F&SF*, and I remember the first issue I got of it had a story in it by Ron Goulart, a Ben Jolson of the Chameleon Corps story. It was hilarious, and it was wonderful, and I’m sure that there’s an awful lot of the Chameleon Corps influence in the first story in *Mindplayers*, at least the first of the *Mindplayers* stories that I wrote. He was always changing his face, and in *Mindplayers* they were always changing their minds, literally, and I’m sure that I’m bouncing off that in some kind of way that I don’t even realise.”

This brings us on neatly to Pat’s first published novel, *Mindplayers*, which came out in 1987. By the time this book was published, Pat Cadigan’s name was well known for her short fiction, and many of her stories had been nominated for awards and included in Best of the Year lists and anthologies. Pat had made contact with organised science fiction fandom in 1975, and had helped organise the 1976 World SF Convention in Kansas City. She had acted as guest of honour Robert Heinlein’s liaison, from which came a friendship which lasted until Heinlein’s death. Pat had worked with her second husband,

Photo: Christopher Fowler



artist and designer Arnie Fenner, on the award-winning magazine *Shayol*. Her name was well established within the field. "I think most people had even managed to work out that the 'Pat' stood for 'Patricia' and not 'Patrick', so they knew I was a woman." Indeed, Pat Cadigan was not just *any* woman writer – she was the *only* woman to be included in Bruce Sterling's seminal cyberpunk anthology *Mirrorshades*. "God bless Bruce, and God bless *Mirrorshades*," says Pat. "That book has been almost continuously in print since it came out, published in many translations, and my story in it, 'Rock On', is still out there earning money for me."

*Mindplayers* is what some people call a "fix-up", a novel made up of a number of previously published stories. I ask Pat how this happened.

"I had been trying to sell Shawna McCarthy a novel that I had had an idea for. She said: 'I'm not real interested in that. Why don't you write a novel about Deadpan Allie – I like her. We could put together a novel with all the stories that you've written.' So I had written "The Pathosfinder" and "Nearly Departed" and "Variation on Man" – those were all in print. I had also written "Lunatic Bridge", although it hadn't come out when I sold the novel. I went to New York and Shawna and I talked about what it ought to be. We were on the same wavelength the whole way through on what kind of book it ought to be. That was one of the great editing experiences that you have, where you and the editor are together all the way through. She said she wanted something before the first story, because when you *expand* from a story, you *start* from a story. She said: 'It's like you open the book, you start reading the book and you realise you've read the story and you think – Oh my God, I can't get out of this story, I'm trapped in the story, when do I get to the end of the story?' So she wanted stuff before that, and stuff after it and stuff in between. I had to rewrite some of the stories to take out some of the basic material and put it in the beginning.

I didn't have any problem with it. I figured anyone who read the stories would *know* that they'd read the stories before. The title of the book would tell them that they were going to read about someone involved with these stories. And anyone who *hadn't* read the stories before had never read the stories before. So – what's the big deal? When you develop a short story you can get away with leaving a lot of stuff blank, which I had done. There was an awful lot that I hadn't thought all the way through. Working at book length I had to think more about the future, why people were the way they were and, what they did next. When I wrote "The Pathosfinder" and "Nearly Departed" I didn't think what people did on vacation in that future. I didn't think about what they did when you weren't looking at them, what they did off camera so to speak, and why they did a lot of things that they did. I had to think about that. I had to make Deadpan Allie into someone who had a life other than what we were just seeing in these stores here and there. I had gone about writing the stories by trying to convey the sense of her coming *out* of a context and then going *back* into a context, rather than being conjured up out of thin air. I wanted to suggest a lot of that."

*Mindplayers* was published in 1987 by Bantam in the US and by Gollancz in the UK. Pat's son, Bob, was born in the same year, and Pat, who was working full-time at Hallmark Cards as a writer and editor, began to feel that she was missing out on too much of his early life. She also had some money saved, and with her first novel out, and her career gathering momentum, she felt it was time to take the plunge, and write full-time. Her mother had retired, and moved to Kansas to be close to her only daughter and grandson.

"When I was writing *Synners* I was doing a lot of taking care of Bob during the day and writing all night. Then Bob would come in and jump on my head at 6.30 in the morning and I'd gone to bed at four, after writing

some debauched scene or something in *Synners* and I'd be like – Ugh! And I'd call my mother and say: 'Mom, come over here and play with him, at least while I get in the shower and wake up again.' I ran on maybe an average of three hours of sleep the whole time that I was writing *Synners*, so I felt like I had lived the whole rock and roll scene there, except I never got to go to any clubs or listen to any music. When I was writing at night, I was wired on coffee with headphones on. I can remember I had the headphones on and the music blaring and I was working away, dancing, working away, dancing, and I would look up and my husband is standing in the doorway and it's two in the morning and he says: 'Bobby is crying.' I say: 'Oh God.' And he'd gotten sick. It's like – hold that thought, OK now, go clean up the vomit. But, that's the... No, that's not the *wonder* of parenthood, there's some other stuff that's the wonder of parenthood, but this comes with it."

Published in 1991, *Synners* is set in a near-future Los Angeles in which a disease of the man-computer interface is threatening to destroy society. It is regarded by some as Pat Cadigan's most successful book to date. Although out of print – like most of her work – and hard to get, Pat regularly receives messages via her web-site, from people desperate to get a copy. A sign of its success was that it won her the Arthur C Clarke Award for best novel in Great Britain. Pat was very pleased and honoured to win the award.

"That was a major deal for me. My British editor, Jane Johnson, called me up to tell me that, and I said: 'Who is this really?' The Arthur C Clarke Award was the one I really wanted. When I found out I got nominated for that I thought: 'Oh Jeez, Oh God, I want this award.' And Paul McAuley was on the ballot and Dan Simmons was on the ballot and I'd read *Raft* by Stephen Baxter and I thought: 'That's going to win.' So when I won I couldn't believe it, I couldn't believe I won the Clarke



Photo: Christopher Fowler

Award, I can't believe I won the Clarke Award *still*."

Pat was even more surprised to win the Clarke Award again for her next novel, *Fools*, published in November 1992 in the US, but not until March 1994 in the UK. The book, set in a similar background to *Mindplayers*, concerns a character who may have three personalities inside her head. It's not an easy read, and one editor famously described it as "unreadable".

"Nobody finds it easy to cope with. In fact, when I finished it, my thought was: 'Oh boy, people are gonna think I lost my mind, they're gonna think I lost all my minds.' Maybe they do. No-one has come up to me and said: 'How could you perpetrate this on anyone? You call this a book – get out of here!' A lot of the reaction that I've had to my face has been positive. The people who respond positively to it, tend to be open to the idea of being put through the changes along with the character. Early on when I was figuring the book out I realised that that's what this is. You open the book and, it's like getting pulled in. Climb in, we're going for a ride!"

By the end of 1993, it looked as if Pat Cadigan's career was well on the way. She had three novels out, three short story collections – *Patterns* (1989), *Home by the Sea* (1993) and *Dirty Work* (1993) – and her short fiction had been widely anthologised. However, no new novel appeared and her short fiction output dwindled. Her next novel, *Bunraku*, will not be published until Autumn 1998. A six year gap between novels – so what happened? I ask.

"Well, what happened was a whole lot of icky personal stuff. In 1993, I'd completed a first draft of what was to be my next novel, *Parasite*, a near future science fiction thriller – if you were doing one of those Hollywood pitches you'd say it was 'Natural Born Killers meets Invasion of the Body Snatchers in the Hot Zone' – but I couldn't get it right. My marriage was breaking down, and I was getting more and more tired and depressed. It wasn't until early 1994 that I finally got the help I needed, and then it was as if I woke up and realised that things had to change. So I spent most of a year getting divorced, and trying to take care of my little boy in the process. I didn't get much writing done, until around Christmas of 1994, when I started writing a novella, about 23,500 words, for Ellen Datlow at *Omni On-Line*, called 'Death in the Promised Land'. After that, I went back to work on *Parasite*, and during 1995 I worked on two more drafts, but I still could *not* get it right. By then, I'd written another novella, 'Tea from an Empty Cup' – also for *Omni On-Line* – set in the same background as the

previous one, but with completely different characters. I decided that *Parasite* had to go on the back-burner for a while, and I took the material from my two novellas and started to re-work it, to create a new novel, which I referred to as 'The Future Japan Novel'. That's because the events take place in a near future, both in 'real reality' and 'artificial reality', in which Japan has been destroyed by an earthquake, and the Japanese people are scattered to the four winds. At that point, late 1995, I thought that I was going to be bound to living in Kansas, because of the custody arrangements for my son. But at Christmas, I realised: 'No, I just *cannot* live here any more, Kansas is stifling me. There *must* be a way to get to London.' So I spoke to my former husband, and we agreed that I could bring my son to London. Well, of course that took up a lot of time, as did the packing up of my house. In the middle of it, I got very, very sick, and was eventually diagnosed as having gall stones, and needing surgery. Of course, I was so broke at this point that I had no medical insurance. I tried to control the illness till I could get to England, but in the end it won, so I had to have keyhole surgery – they made some tiny incisions, dissolved the gall-stones and cleared it all up. But then that took even more time. I finally moved to London at the end of August 1996, just in time for Bob to start the new school term here, and I got back to writing the Future Japan Novel in late 1996. I turned it in to my new publisher in the States, Tor, and to HarperCollins in the UK, in March 1997. Now I'm just waiting for them to get it published. We still haven't agreed on a title, but I really want to call it *Bunraku*. *Bunraku* is a kind of Japanese puppet theatre, and it relates closely to part of the plot of the novel. Anyone who knows what the word means, or who knows anything about Japan, loves the title. Now all I have to do is convince my editors – and the marketing departments."

With her next novel delivered, Pat Cadigan is now working on a number

of ideas for a new one – some science fiction, some 'mainstream', but all with an element of mystery. She has a new British agent, a whole bunch of new short stories either in print or coming into print shortly, and has been working on her first major non-fiction book. This is *The Making of Lost in Space*, a book about the production of the new film version of the old TV series, *Lost in Space*, which is due for release in April 1998 – which is when her book will come out. Although she has written non-fiction before – notably a piece on Carnival Diablo in *Omni* magazine – Pat is excited about this new venture. After she turns the film book in, she will start work on a young adult science fiction novel for Orion, part of the second series of *Web* books. She also has more chance to travel to promote her work.

"Living in Kansas, it was pretty hard to get to conferences where I could meet people who liked my fiction, or who used it, as academics, in their teaching or research. But since moving to London, I've been able to go to academic conferences, most recently in Germany, California and I have another coming up soon in Austria. I've also met a lot of exciting people in what you might call 'cyber-culture', and given readings and talks – I did one last week at Cyberia, a cyber-cafe in central London. My career's been on hold for a while, but I hope that I'm now getting it back on track. And I hope that when readers see *Bunraku*, or get the new short stories, they'll agree that it was worth the wait."

On this note, looking forward to new books and new horizons, we end the interview. As I walk back to the bus stop, I pass a group of Japanese tourists who are having their photos taken outside the semi-derelect Coliseum, which Pat has told me is a Grade II listed former dance-hall, not far from her home. Future or present, it looks as if Japan is here with Pat Cadigan already. 12

All photos of Pat Cadigan by Christopher Fowler. The title picture was taken outside the Coliseum, mentioned above; the other pictures were taken in and around Manor House tube station, where "What I Got for Christmas" is set.





It seems time to disseminate festive cheer with some suitably holly-strewn, wassail-drenched and generally seasonal quotation. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Aunt Ada Doom: "Amos, carve the bird. Ay, would it were a vulture, 'twere more fitting! Reuben, fling these dogs the fare my bounty provides. Sausages... pah! Mince-pies... what a black-bitter mockery it all is! Every almond, every raisin, is wrung from the dry dying soil and paid for with sparse greasy notes grudging alike by bank and buyer. Come, Ezra, pass the ginger wine! Be gay, spawn! Laugh, stuff yourself, gorge and forget, you rat-heaps! Rot you all!" (Stella Gibbons, "Christmas at Cold Comfort Farm," 1940)

## SOME DAMNABLE ERRORS ABOUT CHRISTMAS

**Robert Jordan** belatedly cancelled his GoH appearance at the 1997 Eurocon in Dublin. In a form letter to members, the committee explained all: "This decision was based on reasons of his own."

**Jonathan Lethem** knows how to deal with fans: signing *Amnesia Moon* for someone with reservations about the finale, he subtly added WRITE YOUR OWN ENDING YOU BASTARD.

**Terry Pratchett's** works may soon become, officially, Literature. The British Council's upmarket "Writers and Their Work" series of critical monographs – which admitted Tolkien to the ranks of the saved only in Autumn 1995 – recently requested, and is examining, a proposal for a Pratchett study.

**Ken McLeod** spontaneously puked over an ad for the Official (that is, approved by the desperately hard-up Tolkien estate) *Lord of the Rings* Silver-Plated Chess Set – with each £17.95 piece, in the Danbury Mint's own italics, *set with a sparkling crystal*. "Did the Tolkien estate approve of giving Galadriel the face of a human-alien hybrid? Providing each hobbit with a sparkling crystal football to dribble? Making Sauron look like something dreamed up by Whitley Strieber? This is a crime against our imaginations... Onward to the *News From Nowhere* handcrafted heritage Monopoly™ game! No bank, no jail, no money and no fucking London, but I can't see that getting in the way of an honest profit."

**Naomi Mitchison** was 100 on 1 November 1997.

**Spider Robinson** followed Norman Spinrad in issuing an open letter full of doom and despair, because his latest contract is (in the words of evil Sir Jasper at cruelly oppressive Tor Books) "offering a lower mid-five-figures advance than the previous mid-five-figures advance."

## ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

**William Rotsler** (1926-1997) died on 18 October: he wrote a clutch of sf novels, notably *Patron of the Arts* (1974), and many novelizations, but was best loved in US sf fandom for ebullient personal charm and a vast output of deceptively simple cartoons drawn in the unique Rotsler line... bringing him a 1977 trip to Australia courtesy of the Down Under Fan Fund, and Fan Artist Hugos in 1975, 1996 and 1997, not to mention a 1996 Retro-Hugo for activities in 1945.

**Patrick Tilley's** *Amtrak Wars* series is to be continued by Tilley and Paul Barnett (or Paul's alias John Grant) in collaboration.

## INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

**World Fantasy Awards**, presented at the 1997 World Fantasy Convention in London... Novel: Rachel Pollack, *Godmother Night*. Novella: Mark Helprin, *A City in Winter* (which wasn't even submitted; one judge happened to hear about it, and it ended up with 24 out of a possible 25 points from the judges). Short: James P. Blaylock, "Thirteen Phantasms." Anthology: Patrick Nielsen Hayden, *Starlight 1*. Collection: Jonathan Lethem, *The Wall of the Sky, The Wall of the Eye*. Artist: Moebius. Special/Professional: Michael J. Weldon, *The Psychotronic® Video Guide*. Non-Professional: Barbara & Christopher Roden, for Ash-Tree Press. Special Convention Award: Hugh B. Cave, a once-prolific pulp writer who'll be 88 this year. Lifetime Achievement: Madeleine L'Engle. *British Fantasy Awards* were also presented... Novel: (August Derleth Award) Graham Joyce, *The Tooth Fairy*. Short: Martin Simpson "Dancing About Architecture." Anthology/Collection: Thomas Ligotti *The Nightmare Factory*. Artist: Jim Burns. Small Press: S. T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft: A Life*. Special (Karl Edward Wagner Award): Jo Fletcher.

**Too Late!** My chance to send in the minimum £333 for one share in "Legionnaires PLC" expired on the very day I received their mailing offering the exciting opportunity to finance *Legionnaires*. This British sf film project was/is aiming to raise millions from sf fan investors, the first 3,000 of whom will be invited to appear as extras; its blurb is cagy about the plot ("ONLY ONE THING STANDS BETWEEN A WORLD WITHOUT A FUTURE AND THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD"), but we can deduce at least one large crowd scene.... I admired the described wonders of Film Distribution Shortfall Insurance, whereby if the movie fails to make a profit, "LEGIONNAIRES PLC can claim an amount equal to the shortfall from the insurer." (*Hotspur*: "Why, so can I, or so can any man; / But will they come when you do call for them?") Later, the amazing offer was extended.

### Thog's Language Lesson.

*Battlestar Galactica* official measuring units: 1 cubit = 1 gold coin. 1 centon = 1 minute. 1 micron = 0.1 centon (hence the Very Close Action alert, "Enemy fighters 50 microns away and closing!"). 1 metron = approx 1 metre. 1 parsec = 90 million miles. 1 hectare = 9 million miles. 1 crawlon = 1 spider.

**R.I.P.** Andrew Keir (1926-1997), through his connection with Hammer, appeared in several movies of genre interest but is best remembered for his lead role in *Quatermass and the Pit* (1967); he was the fifth and probably the most convincing of the six actors who played Prof Bernard Quatermass. Meanwhile, American readers report that they remember Burgess Meredith (death noted in IZ 126) for the touching *Twilight Zone* episode where he's the sole survivor on Earth, with time at last to read every book in the library... and breaks his glasses.

**Thog's Masterclass.** "Then Marshall squeezed his eyes shut and nodded his torso a few times..." (Ramsey Campbell, *The One Safe Place*, 1995) "She gave him her evil eye, and he withered." (Christopher Evans, *Mortal Remains*, 1995)... "Oh, God! His eye had begun to twitch. He leaned his face on his head to hide it." (Dave Duncan, *Present Tense*, 1996)... "The bat burped. Granny genteelly covered her hand with her mouth." (Terry Pratchett, *Lords and Ladies*, 1992)... "For a moment, Guy considered charging them in the hope that the surprise would get him through them, but he quickly realized that the street was too narrow for him to force a passage through them by force." (David A. McIntee, *Dr Who, The New Adventures: Sanctuary*)... "Interviews with various cast members – even those who were in one episode or less – appear." (Chris Gregory, *Be Seeing You... Decoding The Prisoner*)



# Family

or

## The Nativity and Flight into Egypt considered

**T**his is a fictional work that compares two famous and internationally popular families. It is held in a document database.

You are invited to follow the *Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt* while varying the tone and content of each episode to suit your own tastes and religious beliefs. You are also able to control how much each episode resembles ***I Love Lucy***.

The text is augmented by soundtrack features. Computer-simulated video will be available sometime during the next 20 years.

Instructions for operation follow. If you prefer, you can go direct to the **Program Tutorial**. It gives two examples of episodes that result from different settings. You'll see for yourself the rich variety of reading experiences contained in the **Family** database.

Here's how it works:

### **Step one: Select your Lucy factor**

Please select only one

The Lucy factor determines how much an episode will resemble the television situation comedy ***I Love Lucy***. You can choose one of two Lucy factors.

#### ☐ **Low Lucy factor**

In this option, resemblances to ***I Love Lucy*** are deeply structural rather than obvious.

Mary and Joseph resemble a couple of the time. They are dressed as extras in a high budget Biblical epic. Mary rides on an ass; Joseph supports the Holy Family by finding freelance carpentry work.

Soundtrack features include sparing use the *Lucy* theme, the jaunty Henry Mancini score for *Hatari* and occasional inspirational bursts of the angelic chorus from the soundtrack of *The Abyss*.

#### ☐ **High Lucy factor**

The Holy Family resemble Lucy and Ricky Ricardo. The flight into Egypt takes place in a 1953 Silverstream trailer/caravan, as in the 1954 Lucy and Desi movie, ***The Long, Long Trailer***. The degree of historical accuracy of the world around them varies considerably according to other parameters. Soundtrack options include "I'm just Sailing Along with the Breeze" from *The Long, Long Trailer*, Irving Berlin's "Mountain Greenery" and selections from the musical *Kismet*.

In both options, the Holy Family are observed by an angelic chorus. Their presence is revealed by bursts of applause and canned laughter.



## dered as episodes of *I Love Lucy* Geoff Ryman

### **Step Two: Select your Divinity Factor**

*Please choose only one*

The Divinity Factor allows you to choose content that best reflects your prejudices about the nature of the Christ and the degree of awareness his mother has of his true state.

#### ☐ **Low Divinity Factor**

Mary is completely deluded. Her son is no more or less a son of God than you or I are. This option works best with a high Lucy factor and limits other choices below.

#### ☐ **Medium Divinity Factor**

Jesus is the son of God, but Mary is fundamentally deluded about what this means. She thinks he will be a King in the usually accepted sense of the term. Works well with both Lucy factors.

#### ☐ **High Divinity Factor**

Mary is in complete command of the situation and understands fully the nature of the Christ. This option works best with a low Lucy factor.

### **Step three: select your Christ-awareness factor**

*Please choose only one*

This option is open **ONLY** if you have selected a medium or high Divinity Factor. It determines the bal-

ance of human and divine characteristics in the person of the infant Jesus.

#### ☐ **Low Christ-awareness factor**

Jesus is the son of God but is an infant and does not know that yet. He is played by a well swaddled plastic model.

#### ☐ **Medium Christ-awareness factor**

Jesus is the son of God, and has *all* knowledge but *no* power. He is helpless and cannot speak. Finds his parents unbearably funny/poignant. God has put Himself on earth so that His aspect that changes with time can learn of the pains, frustrations and temptations faced by human beings. This will teach His temporal aspect the quality of mercy. In some high Lucy-factor scenarios, he is played by a real infant cleverly edited with a voice over by Bruce Willis.

#### ☐ **High Christ-awareness factor**

Jesus is the son of God with all knowledge and all power, but no maturity. Miracles are frequent. For example in the Zagazig episode, he resurrects *Tyrannosaurus Rex* because he wants to see a dinosaur. He also endows it with a sense of humour: it laughs like a hyæna.

Mary and Joseph have a very different kind of learning curve. Infant Jesus is played by Baby Herman from *Who Killed Roger Rabbit?*



**Step four: Select your Flight factor**

Please choose only one

☐ **High Flight Factor**

Herod really has slaughtered the innocents.

☐ **Lowest Flight Factor**

Mary is completely deluded and there is no slaughter of the innocents. Herod does not know they exist.

☐ **Medium Flight Factor**

Mary is completely deluded, but it turns out that Herod is deluded as well but there *has* been a slaughter of the innocents, brought on by Mary's continued boasting that she has given birth to the King of the Jews.

☐ **Alternative Flight Selection**

The infant Jesus sent an angel telling Mary to flee into Egypt because there are no good schools in Nazareth and He wants to receive a sophisticated theological training in cosmopolitan Alexandria. Works best with a high Divinity Factor.

**Alternative option**☐ **High Islamic factor**

*Note: This cancels all other parameters.*

Mariam conceived as a virgin; her son Isa is two-thirds God, one third human; many of the key events of his career happen in Egypt and the wider middle east. No Lucy factor, no soundtrack. Options include only the relevant portions of the Koran. Please note: the Koran is possibly more insistent on the virginity of Mary than three of the four evangelical gospels.

**Step 5: Episode selection**

Select particular episodes from along the route of the Flight through Egypt. You can either choose from the list below or from the live image map that follows.

Please note that most of the events happen in the Egypt of 4 BC. Due to a dating error, it appears that Christ's infancy actually occurred before he was born.

Note also that most of the episodes happen in Egypt. The document database follows the Coptic tradition which avers that many major incidents in Christ's ministry, including raising Lazarus from the Dead actually happened during the flight into Egypt. The crucifixion, fortunately, did not.

In this tradition, the Holy Family visited almost every part of the country. This has proved convenient for the tourist trade. Note that the first mass conversions of gentiles appears to have happened among the native Pharonic Egyptians whose ancient religion had

been discredited by the both the Greeks and Romans.

Carvings in the Coptic Museum in Cairo show the evolution of the ankh into the crucifix. Icons of Isis and Horus were simply re-captioned as Mary and Jesus. Ancient Egyptian tales of Gods impregnating women by whispering in their ear also helped the tale of the Holy Family find ready-made templates in Egyptian culture.

*Photographs © Geoff Ryman of the real locales in Egypt are also available.*

**Episode selection Map**

☐ **Israel:** nativity and early flight.

☐ **Rhinocolura:** a border town

☐ **Zagazig:** a city in the Delta and the site of an important pagan festival. They worshipped cats.

☐ **Cairo and environs:** called Babylon at the time. Just to be confusing.

☐ **Southwards on Nile:** the Holy Family travel nearly the length of the Nile in order to ensure that as many places in Egypt as possible can claim Jesus visited them.

☐ **Oxyrhyncus:** most important city of classical Egypt outside Alexandria.

☐ **Nickyas:** a Jewish village in the far South.

If you feel confident enough to proceed, then make your parameter and episode selection in the order specified. If you're still confused or hesitant when confronted with something this simple, there probably isn't much point trying to help you, but the following Tutorial examples might help you focus.

**Program Tutorial****Example 1**

Let's say you wanted to start with the first episode, **Israel and Nativity**.

You have selected the following parameters:

- ☒ a **low Lucy** factor
- ☒ a **medium Divinity** factor
- ☒ a **medium Christ-awareness** factor
- ☒ a **medium Flight** factor

The episode would read like this:



God was being hauled out of Ashkelon across the desert by his family. All three of his parents were with him, not to mention the midwife.

For God it was as though he were trekking across the surface of his own hand, while being as large and intelligent as a stray paramecium. The plains of stone and sand were like expanses of scrofulous skin, the groves of trees like tufts of hair. Birds creaked in them, like leather. Mary and Joseph were arguing again. Jesus knew what they felt and thought, but could say nothing. He was trapped with them, as if in a situation comedy.

"What slaughter of the innocents?" Joseph was demanding. "There has been no slaughter." He walked in worn sandals ahead of the ass on which Mary rode. With each step, his tools clanked in a shoulder bag. Jesus could feel the cutting weight of the straps tug on Joseph's shoulder.

Mary was certain. "Herod will not suffer him to live." "Herod doesn't know he's alive."

Mary's lips pursed; her eyes narrowed. "Do you think God's Son could come to Earth and not be a king? Do you think Herod will not know that?"

Mary wore a woolen poncho thrown over her head, and a broad-brimmed straw hat against the sun. She was not a well-favoured teenager. She had no chin. Already there was a crease in her neck where flesh would soon blossom into wattle. The lids around her eyes formed swollen circles. Her mouth was set in a firm, thin line that turned downwards.

The infant Jesus wore a purple silk robe and sandals of gold. Joseph looked back over his shoulder. The shoes reflected fire from the sun into his face and he felt instinctively in his bag for the axe. *Thieves*, Joseph thought, *we will be prey to thieves*.

As far as he was concerned, they weren't fleeing Herod. They were fleeing their creditors. The girl had spent all her dowry and more besides dressing the infant as a king. She thinks we'll come into towns and people will say: behold the King of the Jews. What they will say is: behold his sandals. One night the shoes will disappear, or we'll have to sell them off cheaply to buy bread.

Mary had not been a great catch even for an old man like Joseph. In the normal course of things, he would have bedded her on the wedding night, broken her spirit, and made her into a good wife for himself. Instead, she was the wife of God. *What*, Joseph thought, *does that make me?*

"So how far? How far do we have to go, woman, before you feel safe?"

Mary did not answer, and that filled the old man with misgiving. If Mary had convinced herself that the Idumaeen King was pursuing a carpenter across the face of Palestine, where would she stop?

His wife was crazy. It wasn't her fault. It was Joseph's view that giving birth to the Son of God had driven her crazy. But she was in turn driving him mad as well.

*This is just like that Bethlehem business all over again.*

They had no property in Bethlehem, no work in Bethlehem, no friends in Bethlehem, but Mary got it into her head that her son had to be born there. Why? Why? Why?

Because she had finally told him, in a small, grim voice, there is a prophecy in Micah. It is written: a king will be born in Bethlehem.

Of course, anything written has got to be true. Mary

couldn't read, and so had too much respect for writing. Someone must have told her about it.

"It says that a king shall be born in Bethlehem to the house of David in the city of David, and you are of the house of David."

"But I am not the father!" Joseph had said. Well, it was true, he wouldn't have said it except that the whole idea was so crazy. "So He can't be of the House of David."

She had started to cry. "He can be if you adopt him," she said, her face glazed with gloopy tears.

"I won't have to adopt him, you'll both die on the road."

They went to Bethlehem. When the village midwife Salome heard of it, she blamed Joseph. Salome clattered into his workshop, hands on hips, demanding.

"Why are you taking that poor girl with you to Bethlehem?"

"I'm not!" Joseph shouted.

"But she says you have to go to Bethlehem to be taxed."

This was new to Joseph. "What?" he said and covered his face. He was a simple man, he liked working in wood, an hysterical teenage bride enlivened by prophecy and visions of angels was too much for him.

"Yes, she says there is a census and you have to go to the City of David."

"Why?" Joseph asked, "Why would I have to go to Bethlehem to pay a tithe? Are you paying an extra tax, is any one else having to pay a tax? Do you think a new universal tax could be imposed without anyone else knowing about it or some record of it in the law? Who says there is a tax?"

Salome looked flustered. "Well. She says the Governor of Syria."

Joseph shook his head, over and over. "What has the Governor of Syria got to do with Palestine?"

"She said the governor's name is Cyrenius."

"Ay-yay-yah!" He put his head in his hands. "Now she's making up governors." A new thought came to him. "Come to think of it, we don't pay tax to Rome. We pay Herod, and he pays tribute."

Salome said, "This is madness."

"This is Mary," replied Joseph.

"I'm coming with you," said Salome, standing straight, thrusting out her fulsome breasts.

Joseph groaned inwardly. This was not welcome. He was 40 years old and a virgin and he had been lusting after Salome since he was thirteen. The thought of twisting in erotic suspense all across the Samaria through Jerusalem to Bethlehem was more than he could face. "Please, don't do that."

Salome was determined. "She could give birth at any time, the road is dangerous. After I've accused you, I should make it up to you." Her mind settled for both of them, Salome prepared to exit.

Joseph watched her walk. Salome seemed to be made of a loose collection of pillows. Under the gauzy linen, great rolls of flesh shifted plump and independent of each other.

In the days of their youth, Salome had been slim and wild, a wonder of a girl. Salome had run with the boys, led the boys. They all violated the Sabbath and walked the 18 miles from Nazareth to Galilee. They had caught fish, and roasted them on a fire, and Salome bathed naked with the boys. None of them thought less of her for it. She caught the sunset light. Joseph could remem-

ber now, lounging on the shore, looking across the lake to the hills that were pink and blue like wise old faces. The sea was black as if it too tasted of woodsmoke. He had never seen the great lake before. The thought had come to him as he looked at the hills, and at Salome as glossy as some lake creature: this is the Sabbath too. Looking at God's wonders.

She led them into Sepphoris, the great town. It was only a few miles from Nazareth, but it had an amphitheatre with plays in Greek. They had no money, but climbed up the rough walls next to the hill and huddled together on the top benches looking down on the stage. Pagan Gods came up through the floor. Fat, florid men declared in Greek. Salome whispered mockery, and the boys hissed and giggled and were finally herded out. "I feel dirty," Joseph told her afterwards. "Why, because of the actors wearing idol's faces? Oh, la!" She'd laughed at him fondly, and touched his arm with affection. He still remembered the touch.

Everyone had Salome except Joseph. It was a great joke to her. Even Spotty Ezekiel had Salome, in shade, amid giggles. Only Joseph, it seemed, was doomed to virtue. She always seemed to slip away from him, like a silver fish in running water.

He said now, "Salome." His voice was rough. "Salome, I don't want you along because..." He had never said this; it was like hanging off a window ledge before letting go. "... because I look on you with favour." He was sweating. His heart was pumping; it had cost him dearly to say it.

Salome chuckled at him and wobbled a fat finger of forgiving approbation. "Now, now, Joseph. You're a married man, remember?"

"Salome," he said and his voice seemed to melt, his knees gave away, he had to sit down. "I really mean it. This is important."

"Oh la, and you with a strong young wife."

How could he tell her, I haven't had her, the baby isn't mine? Everyone thought he was wily old Joseph who had finally found out what his pecker was for and got a teenager pregnant. Even Salome must think that. He was too proud to say: I am not married in fact.

"I'm terribly flattered," she said, patted him on the arm, and walked away, her wooden shoes clacking like a herd of goat's hoofs.

So Salome had gone with them to Bethlehem. After the birth, she had stayed to help with the child. She did this with all first-time mothers, in effect joining the family.

Salome walked with them now, keeping out of arguments, following up the rear, behind the ass. Her plump thighs rubbed together. Joseph was hearing smooth female flesh stroke itself just below the secret places he had never visited. A year after being married, he was still a virgin. *I won't ever get it, I'm going to die without getting it, like a gnarled old tree.*

It had been even worse on the road to Bethlehem. Desire for Salome had seethed inside him at night as they slept on the grey earth, in a row with the scorpions. At night, Salome, who detested all boundaries would pull open her robes while asleep and her luxuriance would spill forth on to the road like Joseph's unbidden seed. He apologized to God for wasting it on the ground: nobody else wanted it.

And in the morning Salome stretched like cat and went to a stream at first light, shook out her hair, bathed in cool water, which flowed in clinging streams across the back of the breast that was turned away from him. Mary, on the other was modest and didn't bathe or once lift up that lanolin-rich poncho. She smelled like tramp.

Her waters had burst a half day outside Bethlehem. She had tried to hide the downpour from them both. "Is that water?" Salome suddenly demanded. "Sit down and be delivered!"

"No!" the girl had snarled. She kept on walking.

"Mary, you risk killing it."

Mary slapped away her hands and staggered on, chin thrust outwards.

"Mary, the child will die!"

She turned, her grubby face streaked now with tears. "He can't die. He's God!"

Salome was just as determined. "You stupid girl! I won't put up with this."

"Who needs you? Who needs you to deliver him, you childless old whore!"

"What did you call me?"

The child stumbled on. "I know you, you're only here because you want my husband."

Salome was outraged at the suggestion. "Joseph? Me, want your dried up, old locust of a husband?"

Joseph muttered. "It's so nice to be fought over."

The girl broke into a run. "He... will... be born in Bethlehem." The last word broke like a cup into a kind of scream. Mary kept on running.

Salome was fat, short of wind, and wobbled after her. Joseph was left walking behind them, forgotten, unnecessary. A kind of admiration for his wife took root. You had to admire the girl. Mary walked on for a further hour in the sun, evading Salome's grasp, darting ahead at the sound of clacking shoes. Mary clutched herself, hissed with pain, everything in her clenching with determination, holding back. Finally she collapsed, doubling over into the road. Defeated, she pounded the dust with her fist.

"Oh, Mary, Mary, child what has got into your head?" Salome leaned over her, stroking Mary's hair.

Mary sobbed. "There was an angel. It promised me, promised me."

Joseph caught up with them. Salome turned on him. She picked up a rock and hit him with it, on the thigh. "You *useless* man, what are you doing, can't you see your wife is now in trouble?" Her plump face concentrated all the rage at her own desertions into a snarl. "You're all the same! All you think you need do is stick in and out and be done with it." She spun her attentions back to the girl still curled up on the roadway.

"Come on my darling," said Salome, and tried to lift Mary up. The girl screamed.

Inside her, the unborn babe knew all this, and felt the pain and anger. He knew He was causing it, but could do nothing except force all of them through it. No wonder, God thought, no wonder none of them remember being born.

So as not to feel entirely beside any point, Joseph did what a stranger in the road might have done. He cradled Mary up, and bearing the extra weight as well as he could without jolting her, carried her into a barn.



In the straw, Mary passed the child quickly and simply. Joseph saw nothing of it, it was done at such a speed.

But Salome had seen something. Joseph saw her face fall, her eyes widen in wonder, narrow with questioning.

"What is it, what?" he asked. He feared the child was dead.

Salome's head shook once, in rejection. Then businesslike, she slapped the child, got it breathing, bit through the cord, tied it, wrapped it.

"It's a boy, my darling, you have son, it's a boy," Salome said with an air of slight preoccupation.

The door boomed, kicked open, slamming against the inside wall of the barn. Sheep bleated their way in, followed by two shepherds.

"She's just given birth, ssh," warned Salome.

The shepherds were boys and they leaned over in curiosity, hoping to glimpse genitalia that did not belong to sheep. Salome was onto their tricks and had already pulled a corner of the robe down over her charge.

"Gave birth, just now. In the barn?" one of them asked. They weren't too bright.

"And he's alive?" said the other one.

"That's a miracle," said the first, with a sniff.

That was all they said, and then left.

Mary's face was suffused as if with dim twilight.

"They saw," she murmured. "They knew."

"Knew what?" said Joseph, dreading what fresh folly might follow.

"They said it was a miracle," she whispered.

"They meant it was a miracle he survived!"

Joseph wasn't worth noting. Mary looked away from him towards Salome, her smile undisturbed. "They came to adore him. They must have had some word or sign from God. Mark it, Salome."

Joseph yelped. "It's winter! They put their animals in the barn and then they left."

Mary was talking to no-one but herself. "He was born in the city of David and the animals and the simple people saw the signs and came and adored him." Pale, drained of sweat and blood, she slept.

Joseph went out into the night, a cool Palestinian winter night that was calm with all the stars overhead, and he wept too, wept out of wounded pride, and from being unloved.

That was when he saw an angel of his own. Joseph was quietly proud of his angel. From Mary's descriptions of her angel, his was plainly a better model. His angel had wings and the feathers looked like wires of gold individually joined to spines of silver. They must have cost a fortune, and the workmanship was superb. The wings had opened and closed, like a beautiful machine, and quivered in the candlelight of vision, flickering red and orange and white. They had numbers on them, red on white circles: 17 and 22. The face of the angel was both human and inhuman, like a statue in marble. The nose had no indent at the top and the curl of the upper lip was perfect like the crest of a wave. The eyes were blank white with veins.

The angel did not need words. Mary might be plain and grindingly virtuous, but she had been chosen for strength not grace. What she had said was true; she had been with no other man. Joseph had been chosen to care for her and to protect the child. He would never know love. He had been chosen for other things.

In other words, God was treating Joseph like women always had.

In the morning, neither Joseph nor Salome had the heart to tell Mary that they were not in Bethlehem.

"Stop that," said Mary in disgust.

The horrible old man had been scratching himself down there.

"Stop what?" her husband replied wearily. The man doesn't even know he does it. What is it with men that their animal natures are so near the surface? They are more in love with a part of their bodies than they are with their wives.

*Surely God did not mean for me to end up with this old man! I was sold into slavery at the first offer!*

Her own fat grizzled father made it plain she was no beauty and that he looked forward to selling her. "That will take you down a peg or two then," her father had said with a chuckle. "Mixing women and religion. Religion is men's stuff. You get women involved and they all start talking about love. But they mean bloodless virtue."

Religion was the family business; priesthood was inherited. Her father was a scholar; or rather, a wastrel with books. It was his uncle Zacharias who was the priest.

"Religion is about love," Mary insisted grimly.

"Mary, don't contradict Daddy," said Elizabeth. Elizabeth was her older sister, with flowing hair, midnight eyes and a father fixation.

"Religion," repeated her father, to indicate even to Elizabeth that he needed protection from no one, "is about justice and repentance. It's about wrongdoers quailing before the Lord. And it's about the rest of us simply going about our business and following the Law."

"You mean selling all the crumbs of bread in the house to a gentile at Passover."

"I mean religion is part of everything we do." He shook his head at her.

All Mary wanted to do was shed her body. Yes, she was fat and pale, yes she had spots on her back. Her only good feature was her strong brown teeth. But none of that mattered when there was prayer and holy days and the story of Ruth, of Judith. She too wanted to defend her people, she too wanted to die for God. She did not want to be ordinary.

Once she had waited all night to see swallows be born, for they flew like she wanted to fly, and they returned to a distant spiritual home. Her mother had tried to coax her back in, and having failed, conspired to make her husband think Mary had been in her bed all night. Mary spent the night on the dirt roof, leaning over to peer into a hole in the wall just above the reed supports. The chicks were born at dawn, in the rafters. What shocked Mary was that the birth was not beautiful. The chicks were scrawny, covered in slime, miserable looking. It was as though she had hoped to glimpsed through the broken shells of the eggs a burst of light, a gateway back to the source of life, before bodies.

Mary campaigned against litter. At the close of every market day, she would berate each trader in turn: what makes you think you can leave your shucks over the ground for other people to clean? You leave your donkey mess behind, bury it! At that age, she had a piping, irritating voice: people would try to be charmed but winced

soon after she started grating away at them. Finally, to teach her a lesson, her father withdrew his protection.

The people who made their scant living collecting the shucks or scooping and selling the shit, turned on her. They were low people, broken people. An old crone, missing fingers, slapped her hard on the face. "You stop your squawking little miss, or you'll get even worse." Mary had fled home in terror and confusion. In the shade of their courtyard, her father waited, eating a fig, her sister draped across his lap. Her father laughed at her. "Not so easy, trying to rule the world, is it?"

She fled into the room where she slept, terrified, mortified, surprised. She had learned to keep her virtue watchful rather than vocal.

But she did watch: men who spat on floors or who found ways to work on the Sabbath without breaking the letter of the Law; whores in spangles with uncovered heads and filmy robes who travelled with the caravans, chewing betel in public. She saw the publicans who gathered tax for the Romans and leeches off their own people. She saw the slaves, and the slaves who owned them, and the slaves who thought they ran things: the Jewish charioteers given land in exchange for service in the armies of Egypt. She saw virtuous men who could not marry until old; the young maidens who were sold to them. Mary wanted a harrowing. She wanted schooling, and was denied it.

This amused her father, more than anything else. "I knew it. You are a scribe at heart. You wish to spend your days in study."

Mary had no answer: it was true, she did, she yearned to read scripture. "You'll have no need of letters, where you're bound," her father said. "And you'd best get used to it, there is no other way."

Her mother was more kindly. "We are the heart of the Law," she said, stroking Mary's hair. "We keep ourselves pure. We are the ones who make the sabbath meals, we are the ones who keep the house clean. We don't need books or schooling." Her mother's heart ached for her.

"Mary, you are a woman. You will never see beyond the first court of the Temple. If you love the Law, and I know you do, you will accept that."

Mary tried to accept it, with tears in her eyes.

Woman, she was. It was her misfortune to grow large, grow early. There was the first terrible flow of blood. She went weeping with shame to her mother who grew truly alarmed. This was no ordinary staining of linen; it was a wound that needed staunching. "Child, child," her mother whispered, in fear. "Elizabeth, fetch the midwife." Mary's beautiful sister was smiling. She knew would hate the blood, would make a fuss.

"Elizabeth," her mother said. "Fetch the midwife." Elizabeth's smile had not quite faded. Her mother pushed her. "Run, I said, this is not normal."

Salome waddled across the village, her component parts threatening to avalanche free, as if held together only by her translucent linen. Mary had always hated her.

"It's a cleansing," Salome pronounced it. "That's what the flow of blood is for, to cleanse us from inside. She needs to eat meat or fish, if you can get it."

A stupid thing to say; what did that old whore know about cleanliness? If it was a cleansing, then why did it feel so filthy? They ran out of linen to smear the blood away; they used rags that smelled of death. The dried

blood smelled of rust. Mary sweated, shook. This happens every month?

"With some women," said Salome, "the flow of blood never stops. They must have clean souls." Salome chuckled. Mary's mother thanked her. Elizabeth looked a bit miffed; her times were slight; did this reflect on the cleanliness of her soul? Mary was tired of them all, with their fears and jealousies and jokes. She turned her head away from her family, her village, to the wall.

The angel came quietly to her in the night. Mary felt it sit next to her in the dark, a pressure only, a warmth along the back of her knees. Her angel was comfort and a kindly voice in the night.

She was indeed to be raised up above women, above men, she was indeed to be blessed, as far away from the common run of things as it was possible to imagine. It was all the sign Mary needed. After that, she never doubted.

A month later her father came into the house. "We've married you off," he said, pleased. They had given her, the daughter of a priestly family, to a carpenter.

Joseph asked again, "What are we going to do in Gaza?"

No answer. "Hmm? There is no wood in Gaza, woman. What wood they have, they grow things on. No trade for me there or money for dressing your son like a prince."

A fox's tail was tied as an amulet to the front of the ass's head. Mary watched it swing back and forth as the beast picked its way between the stones. She tried to ignore Joseph.

"What was wrong with Ashkelon? It is not in Herod's kingdom. Were we no safe enough there? Eh? We go to Gaza then what? I have no work, we have no home. We get hungry. How long do we stay? Where do we go next?"

Mary braced herself. She would let him wash over her like breaking waves on rocks.

"Ah?" He turned and pulled the beast to a stop. Dazed and exhausted the little animal tried to walk on, blinked stupidly, miserably. The beast was a dependent little female; she was scared of Joseph.

*I want the animal yearned, to go home.* Nothing smelled right to it. Everything smelled of a different dust, a wrong dust, and of different plants; the air in Nazareth was always softer from the moisture in it. The heat whispered to the tiny animal: *Desiccation. Death*. The animal knew more things, different things than the people.

Joseph was insisting on an answer. "Just how far are we going to go? Where are you taking us?"

Mary sighed. "It is still the heat of the day, Joseph, we can talk about this elsewhere."

"Yes, you're right, it is the heat of the day, and Salome and I are walking in it while you ride, like some kind of Queen in your own head." He stood still. "It is the heat of the day for both of us, only I have stopped walking. So we talk here."

"We can talk in Gaza."

"Gaza is the furthest reaches of Palestine. Beyond that it the wastes."

"We are nearly there."

"And there is nothing there. So do we turn around? Where do we go from there?"

Mary chewed the inside of her cheek. It had taken all her powers of subterfuge and bad temper to drive them

this far. She had known that she would have to tell him some time, and judge her moment carefully. She could not leave it too late. She hung back for a moment, then decided. She sat up straight and told him.

"Egypt."

"Egypt!" he whispered.

"We may have to go there, yes." She wanted to leave him some doubt. "Gaza still lies in Herod's power."

"Egypt! Where we do not speak the language, where there are heathen Nubians and the apes of Rome!"

Mary said quietly "There are Jews as well."

"Why are we going to Egypt!" Joseph howled, in rage and dismay.

"Because the angel told me to," Mary answered him.

Joseph twisted and turned as if in a harness. "Oh, yes, of course, your angel. Whatever mad plan you have, you can say your angel told you. Where is this angel? Let him come down and tell me."

Mary smiled, foolish man. "You are blaspheming Joseph."

He grunted and dropped the reins. He paused. "All right. You go to Egypt."

And he started to walk away. He was walking away quite purposively.

"We will," warned Mary. "We will go on without you."

"Good!" he shouted.

*I want to go home*, yearned the beast. It turned to follow Joseph, who was walking the right way. It trotted after him, grateful, its internal compass telling it they had all swung homeward. Its reins trailed in the dirt and Mary tried to lean forward to catch them as she too was borne helplessly homewards.

"Salome, help. Joseph, what kind of husband are you?"

He turned his face towards her, but kept walking backwards. "No kind of husband," he said. "We are not wed. The child is not mine, we have not known each other, you are nothing to me. I renounce you! We are not married!"

He turned and walked on.

Mary was full of rage. "You are wed to me by all the traditions of our people!"

Joseph turned again, his eyes hard, narrow, sad. "By all the traditions of our people the marriage has not been consummated."

"Salome, help me catch the reins."

Salome was walking after them, but seemed unmoved by the urgency of what was transpiring. She trailed behind.

"Salome," Mary ordered her. "Take the reins!"

Salome chuckled at her. "You mean the animal won't obey you?"

Mary's face was crossed with confusion, it went limp, like loose flesh at the back of her legs. She was in nightmare, defeated by an ass, defeated by a carpenter, defied by Salome. "Joseph! Joseph!" she called, demanding.

His back was turned towards her; a hand waved her away. "Go to Egypt. So I can forget you!"

Salome was walking in the direction of home as well. "It will be better for you not to take the beast. You'll have no money to feed it."

Determination hardened Mary's dusty face. She lunged forward, to seize the reins, and managed to

grasp hold of them. But the silken robes of the child slithered. The infant Jesus tumbled from her grasp. She cried aloud and the baby fell onto the stones and began, immediately, to wail.

Mary shouted, stumbled down from the ass's back and fell herself onto the dust. Salome kneeled beside the baby. It screamed raucously, over and over.

"There, there, oh, you fell," Salome said in a sing song voice. "Silly little Mummy dropped you. Isn't she a silly girl? Look, there, see? It's just a little cut." Salome lifted it up to her mouth and began to suck out the blood and grit. "See? It's nothing." The infant was inconsolable.

Mary stood and eased the babe out of Salome's grasp. The midwife did not look at her. The child kept howling, and to Mary, it seemed he was not crying because he had fallen. He was crying in protest, at them. His face was twisted up, his lungs bursting it seemed with the effort of crying. There was blood welling up from his arm. God could still be hurt. The infant could be lost in a struggle or die from thirst. He screamed and screamed.

A woman alone could not cross into Egypt without disaster. There was the desert, there were the thieves, there was worse than that.

I cannot afford emotion, Mary thought. I can afford no indulgence, no lack of wisdom, all must be policy. With regrets, but then she had her great charge.

"Joseph?" she called, in a clear voice. "Joseph, you are right. We will stay in Gaza."

Salome looked up. Joseph stopped and turned, eyes distrustful. He bargained. "And if we have no news of Herod, no tales of a slaughter, then we go home."

Mary nodded, yes, submissively, for she knew they would have no such news.

"And we will work to repay the shoes and cloth you have bought?"

She ducked again to his will, and added, her voice raised enough for him to hear. "Perhaps they should be sold, and the creditors repaid."

Under her breath Salome said, "Well done."

"It is very foolish to show them openly like I have done."

Joseph jerked himself straight, proud, began to walk towards them. He was shaking, weak at the knees. He was not up to argument or angry emotion. Poor man, Mary found herself thinking, poor old man. And then she thought: this marriage will have to be consummated. Out of policy.

"Thank you, Salome," she said, and passed back the infant to her. She stripped him of his purple silk. He coughed himself quiet. Slowly with some regret, she folded up the robe, and held it out to Joseph. "Could you keep this in your bag for me, Joseph?" She turned and began to unbuckle the gold shoes, a dis-investiture. "Don't worry little Prince," she told Jesus. "You must look normal for a while. Salome? Do you still have swaddling?"

There, sitting in the dust, Mary bound the babe round and round with linen, until he was an unmoving parcel. "I know, I know, I hate it too." She started to sing a lullaby. The infant no longer wailed; he looked up at her solemnly, almost as if in pity.

Then Mary strode ahead, carrying him. "Ride, if you



would like to, Salome. I want to walk," was all she said. She led them towards Gaza. Scowling, confused, Joseph clicked his tongue at the ass, and pulled it round. *Home*, mourned the ass.

The infant remained watchful. Mary bundled him closer to her and whispered into his ear: "Never mind your robes, Little One, I will see you King. I will let no harm befall you, and I will see that you are schooled any way that I can, by Roman or Jew, and when you are King, I will fade back into Nazareth, out of your way."

The child was looking at her, round eyed, unsmiling, and perhaps, even slightly afraid.

They'd left it too late, wandered in too many circles of argument, to reach Gaza by nightfall. They would have to sleep rough again, away from the road. It was for the best, it would save another night's fees for an inn in Gaza. They took care to walk until it was nearly nightfall; they left the road in dim twilight; listened for any crackling of undergrowth or slippage of stones: if they were followed, it would be by thieves. They found a lone acacia, and hid behind its leeward shelter.

"Salome," Mary said. "I want you to take the child away, after dinner, as if to change him. Stay away, for as long as you can. Ah?"

Salome started to speak, but her lips hesitated as if about to fall from a precipice. She bowed in acquiescence. They ate their supper of bread and dried fish from Ashkelon.

"The child needs changing," said Salome and walked.

A blustery twilight wind buffeted them. Towards the ocean in the west there was a dull and dirty bronze sunset, full of dust. The plain was all in blackness, and Salome stumbled in darkness. Her heart ached, for Joseph, for what she knew would happen now. The infant, bound and helpless was pressed to her breast. There was a seepage of heartache between them.

Jesus saw her memories. He saw a Joseph from many years ago, whom Salome mourned as if he were dead. Tall and straight with beautiful skin that made his willowy slenderness glow with health, a rugged face always softened when he looked at her by a kind of fazed respect and wonder. Salome had been deliberately heedless of herself when younger. Something wild in her made her throw herself like a scarf into the wind. She had sex with all those boys, so variably attractive with their peasant scrawniness, their unexpected beauty, their rural cruelty because she felt nothing for them. It was done lightly, for adventure.

Only sleeping with Joseph could have hurt her. It would have hurt her if that beautiful gaze ever soured into scorn or pity. So she preserved it. She saved that look of kind regard year after year as they both grew older. The look was always present, always returning within the confines of Nazareth like swallows. As she coarsened, as she fattened, Salome had only grown more afraid of its loss. She also grew afraid on his behalf; for by then she was a woman of low reputation. She knew that she could have had Joseph for a husband at any time, by asking, but it would have ruined him.

So. Now he was married to this stern dumpy little thing who was too much for him. So he was married and would never be hers and both of them were safe.

At times she still dreamed of a family with a man

like Joseph, who ran something like a carpenter's shop, made a respectable living. She sometimes dreamed of having children around her who were not other people's. But mostly she dreamed of being free from it.

So here she was; with one part of what she wanted. Salome stopped walking and stood staring at the stars as they appeared. God stared with her.

He was used to seeing all the stars at once, and all their history at once, from their birth as granules in clouds of fire, to spinning disks, to young fierce concentrations, to final eruptions or collapse, all of it all at once in a blur. He was used to comprehending the hearts of stars: their million million particles splitting and reforming.

He was used to seeing all of human history, seething up from the mud. He saw it covering the surface of a planet like a virulent bloom of mould on the surface of a fruit, and then dying back. People had been complete for him; the species and the individuals, from birth to death.

God had no stories. He heard all voices at once, so there was no tone of voice to tell a story with. There were no mysteries for God and no wonders. Judgement was easy.

Now all the stars were alone, as individual as babies and just as trapped in time. God found he loved them. To love, to feel mercy, you had to focus on one tiny, helpless little thing at one tiny helpless time.

You had to focus on a fat, aging woman held in low esteem who had been too big a character for her village, and who was now standing aside so that the only man she had ever loved could finally be deflowered for reasons of policy. She accepted it, and she had to wait. So you heard her waiting, counting moments, trying to imagine how long it would take for Mary to summon nerve and overcome sexual distaste. How quick to get Joseph to understand what he had finally been offered. How long to get his old body, so unused to ease, to finally relax and open.

You had to hear her trying to be amused, trying to adopt her usual knowing manner. And when that didn't work, to acknowledge that she was jealous. She had wanted to keep him her Joseph, but only on the street in passing. Life wasn't like that. So she tried to hold on to wisdom by looking at the stars. *It's all the same in the end, Sal my girl, all the same in the end.*

The wind had died down. *Right, that's it. Heave yourself back now, and say excuse me if you catch them at it.* She sighed, and walked back.

Their lone acacia was silver in moonlight. In its shadow, Mary and Joseph lay asleep in each other's arms, stewing in matrimony. Salome lay the bound infant next to his mother. Humming to herself she unpacked a blanket, and threw it over them both to keep out the chill.

*It's time Sal.*

It always happened like this, there was a moment when she realized she was no longer needed. The baby would live or die by itself, the parents had found their own way of caring. Salome left her charges, her hundreds of children. Some of them now had children of their own, and she had to stop herself saying to them: I remember delivering you, and now it's your turn. Who needed the memories of an old midwife? Salome was always clear when she was not needed.

But she couldn't help looking one more time at Joseph's face. Who would have thought that quite a such a monumental fate would befall her simple, kindly Joseph? They would go to Egypt all right. Mary had decided. And the babe?

Salome looked at the babe, too and his wide eyes were full on her. They swam with unnatural pity, adult understanding. It was the look she had seen in his eyes the moment he was born.

"You," she said in anger. "You."

She knew who he was.

"Decided to visit, did you? See what it's like? What do you think of your handiwork?"

The child looked away in shame.

"Why do you leave us so alone? Why don't you help instead of looking down at us like mice?"

He tried to say... *Because...*

She turned and drew a deep breath. She felt cold, calm, bereft. She turned and began to walk back down over the rocks towards the road.

The child couldn't talk.

*I leave you alone because I love you. If I came and ruled you, if I gave you what you want, if there were miracles, you would not be free...*

She couldn't hear. She simply wanted to vanish. Salome kept on walking, a shadow against the stars, then simply a shadow melting into other shadows. Outside the focus of the story, outside the family.

Jesus turned and saw Joseph dreaming. His angel had come back to him. But this time the angel looked like Jesus at twelve years old, in a spotless beige robe that his mother beat clean daily. He had a soldier's grin, a mother's eyes.

"Take me into Egypt," the angel wheedled, like a child.

"Why?" groaned Joseph. He'd had enough of angels.

The angel went coy. It twisted in place, looking up at Joseph smiling naughtily, its voice teasing, sing-song. "Be-cause..."

It was the only reason for anything.



## Example 2

✓ **Location:** Rhinocolura

✓ **High Lucy factor**

✓ **Low Divinity factor**

✓ **Medium Flight factor**

There is the image of a grey heart on grey satin. Music bongos its way at motor speed, jazzy, happy. Flowing script writes itself across the heart: *I Love Mary*.

*Starring*  
*Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz*  
*with Vivian Vance and William Frawley*  
*and*  
*Desiderio Alberto Arnaz IV*  
*as the infant Jesus.*

The music hops emphatically up and down at its summit, ends, and we are in a world of black and white.

In that world is a familiar set, the ground floor of a house in a village in rural Palestine. The Ricardos, a highly successful family, have moved there from Jerusalem, along with their friends and ex-landlords, the Mertzs who have become chicken farmers. Joey Ricardo is a famous Cuban bandleader.

His wife MARY now dashes about the set, looking for something in a panic. She wears a sweater and black three-quarters length slacks. She picks up a newspaper, and flicks frantically through it. The angels laugh.

MARY hears a door open. She jams the paper underneath her sweater

Her friend and local midwife SALOME MERTZ enters. MARY wilts with relief. The angels applaud the regular co-star Vivian Vance. She carries a wicker basket.

SALOME

Hi Mary, I thought I'd bring you back these eggs I borrowed.

MARY (Leans against a sofa)

Nothing like the egg I just laid.

SALOME

Why Mary, what's wrong?

MARY

Oh, Sal! I put a birth announcement in the newspaper and now I can't find it.

SALOME (Waves it away)

It'll show up.

MARY (Looks guilty)

Salome. It's a *birth* announcement.

SALOME (Thinks, then realizes)

Mary! You didn't go and tell everybody that little Haysoos is the son of God did you?

MARY, cringing, nods yes

SALOME

Oh, Mary! You can't do that! Joey will be furious!

MARY

I know.

SALOME

And what will King Herod say?

MARY

Well... you know that trip I've always wanted to take to Egypt?

SALOME (Meaning yes, so?)

Uh-huh.

MARY

I thought now would be a good time to take it.

SALOME (Shakes her head disapprovingly)

You better talk to Joey before he reads that announcement.

MARY

I know. That's why I've GOT to find that part of the paper!

SALOME

Well where did you have it last?

MARY

All over!

There is a sound of a door opening. We hear JOEY.

JOEY (Offstage)

Hi honey!

MARY tries to adopt an elegant, relaxed pose by the sofa. Then she spots another stray single sheet of newspaper. MARY snatches it up. There is no more room under her sweater. In desperation, she crunches the paper up and jams it into her mouth.

JOEY enters. The angels applaud, and the cast waits politely for them to finish. MARY, back towards Joey, chews frantically.

SALOME

Hiya, Joey. I'm just on my way out.

(As she passes him she says, a bit angry with Mary)

Enjoy your trip.

JOEY goes to Mary and kisses her on the cheek. There is crunching sound. JOEY seems not to notice.

JOEY

What's up with Salome?

MARY (Can't talk. She shrugs airily, meaning: who knows?)

Hmmmm.

JOEY

Have you seen tonight's paper?

MARY (Shakes her head no and grunts, her mouth full)

Uh-uh.

JOEY (His expression darkens)

You haven't. You're sure?

MARY (Nods yes)

Mmm hmmm.

JOEY (Arms folded, looking smug, rocking back and forth on his heels)  
So... uh... how come you're eating it?

MARY (Chews and chews and forces herself to swallow. When she speaks next she sounds a little bit like Donald Duck.)

Sorry honey, eat the newspaper?

JOEY

And hide the rest of it under your sweater.

MARY (Acting surprised, as she fetches it out. Her voice roughens down to normal.)

Well goodness me. So *that's* where it went. No wonder I couldn't find it!

JOEY

Mary. What are you up to?

JOEY gestures for the newspaper. MARY is about to pass it to him, when she spots, over Joey's shoulder, the missing part of the paper. MARY tries to manoeuvre her way between it and Joey, while offering him the rest of the paper. As he turns to follow her, he sees it as well. Both lunge for it at the same time. JOEY snatches it first.

MARY (Doing anything to get his attention)

Joey... Joey honey... I'm... I'm going to have a baby.

JOEY (Unimpressed, knows she's up to something, continues to look through the paper.)

Gee honey that's wonderful news. Is this one going to be a Son of God as well?

MARY

Oh, you kid! No.

(Tries to snatch the paper from him)

You know how we get these cravings, and I... just wanted to eat a newspaper. So, here, have this part of the newspaper back.

JOEY (Reading aloud from the newspaper increasingly angry)

"Famous bandleader Joey Ricardo and his lovely wife Mary are pleased to announce that their son Haysoos is born King of the Jews and the longed-for Messiah!"  
Mary, are you crazy?

MARY

I thought the birth of the Messiah was the kind of thing people might want to know. You know. Good news.

JOEY

It's not what King Herod wants to know. When were you going to tell me? When the soldiers came to arrest us for treason?

JOEY freezes. He thinks a moment. Then he panics. JOEY throws open the closet door and hurtles out a suitcase. He fumbles it open, dashes back to the closet and comes out with an armful of suits and shirts on hangers.

MARY (Tries to draw his attention as he packs)

Joey, I thought about that. Joey, I'm not dumb, you know.

JOEY

No, I don't know.

MARY (Pulls out a blue travel documents folder and tries to wave it at him)

Joey. Tickets, Joey. Joey? Ticky, Joey?

Without pausing, JOEY snatches it from her and reads as he hurtles a valuable looking clock and a photograph from the windowsill into his case.

JOEY

"Confirmation... week's booking in Rhinocolura... Egypt.

(He collapses in relief against Mary)

Thank you.

(He looks up)

Egypt? Mary, if this is some kind of trick to get your trip to Egypt, I'll... I'll...

MARY

What?



JOEY  
I'll go straight away!

MARY  
You mean it? You're not mad?

JOEY  
I'll get mad later, right now I'm going crazy. You pack some food, the money. I'll get the things for the car... Hurry...

**Ext: later that same day: the road to Rhinocolura**

Obvious second unit footage. Soundtrack plays "I'm Just Sailing Along with the Breeze". A Silverstream trailer soars past a peculiarly artificial sign saying "Welcome to Egypt".

**Interior: a few minutes later: the border office**

There are two doors one signed "Israel" on the left, one "Egypt" on the right. Near the right hand door, some Egyptian troops sit behind a desk. On the wall behind them is another sign: "Egyptian Customs." The soldiers wear what look like ordinary American police uniforms, and they talk with gruff New York accents. There is a long line of defeated travellers in front of the desk. The travellers wear dirty Biblical robes. One carries a goat, another has a load of firewood on his back. THE MAN WITH GOAT engages in desultory argument with the soldiers. There is another desk with a sign over it that reads: "Bureau de Change."

MAN WITH GOAT  
I tell you, without I sell my goat, I won't have the entry fee!

POLICEMAN 1 (Portly, pale, self assured, deeply dumb. He points to words in a book of regulations)  
Entry... fee. No fee, no entry. And it's gotta be in Egyptian drachmas.

Enter MARY AND JOEY, in obvious disguise. They wear long trench coats, slouch hats. Both of them sport obvious false moustaches. Mary tries to swagger like a tough guy.

JOEY (Low voice)  
I'll go change some money, you save us a place in line.  
(At the word "money", MARY's jaw drops)  
Mary?

MARY  
I forgot.

JOEY  
What you mean?

MARY  
Don't be mad honey. I forgot to bring any money.  
(Gets frantic)  
We were packing in such a hurry and I just forgot!  
(She dissolves into loud wailing Mary tears)  
I'm sorry. Huh, uh-huh, uh-huh.

POLICEMAN 2 enters, gawks at Mary, sobbing in her moustache. She uses the ends to wipe her eyes. He shakes his head.

POLICEMAN 2  
Theatre people.

JOEY (Desperate to avoid attention)  
Shhh! There's no problem. I'll just have to go back.

MARY  
To Hebron? They'll be looking for you.

JOEY  
Mary, we can't even get in without money!

POLICEMAN 2 (Loudly, to his colleagues)  
D'ja hear what the Israelis have gone and done now?

POLICEMAN 1  
No. What?

POLICEMAN 2  
Herod's gone and killed every male child in Bethlehem.

POLICEMAN 1 (Shaking his head in admiration)  
Those crazy guys! What'll they do next?

POLICEMAN 3  
You gotta hand it to them. They don't do nothin' halfway.

POLICEMAN 1  
I wouldn't wanna be that Joey Ricardo, huh? Not only is Herod after him, but his own people aren't gonna be too happy with him either now that Herod's killed all their kids because of him.

POLICEMAN 3  
They'll skin him alive!

JOEY stands frozen with terror, his hand plunged into the brylcreem order of his hair.

JOEY  
There's got to be some money in the trailer. Mary. Don't do anything to attract attention.

For some reason the angels laugh. JOEY exits.

MARY stands in line miming elaborate nonchalance. Two CRIMINALS slink in line behind her. One of them is wearing a trench coat, slouch hat and false moustache. The other wears torn Biblical robes and is dirty, furtive, and desperate. MARY overhears them.

CRIMINAL 1  
The place is crawling with cops!

CRIMINAL 2  
They're looking for that Joey Ricardo.

CRIMINAL 1  
They'll recognize me. I'd pay anything for a disguise!

MARY's jaw drops. She turns to them. She winks, broadly. THE CRIMINALS look bemused. Mary's attempts to communicate get wilder and wilder. She bats her eyes, says psst! and beckons closer.

CRIMINAL 1  
Sorry, buddy, you're not our type.

In desperation, MARY peels back the moustache. Finally THE CRIMINALS understand. They look at each other in delight, and all three sidle next to each other.

MARY (Gruffly, trying to sound like a guy)  
150 drachmas.

CRIMINAL 1  
That's highway robbery!

MARY  
No, Egyptian customs.

CRIMINAL 2  
Same difference.  
(To CRIMINAL 1)  
We don't have time to argue!  
(Passes MARY the money)  
Here.  
(MARY gawks at the bills. He grabs hold of her.)

We'll change in the Gents.

MARY  
The Gents!

CRIMINAL 1  
Come on.

MARY  
I... I... I... can't!

POLICEMAN 3 (Stands, stretches)  
I'm going to take a leak.

The CRIMINALS spin on their heels away from him. MARY stands bolt upright. POLICEMAN 3 strolls past them, noticing nothing.

The other POLICEMEN are busy with people in the line. MARY looks around.

Suddenly she turns, crams the hat on CRIMINAL 1. She waits as two travellers pass in the opposite direction, then spins around and slaps the moustache over CRIMINAL 1's face. He nearly swallows it. Finally she opens up the trench coat.

Under the trenchcoat Mary is wearing her wedding dress. It is the full enchilada, embroidered with pearls, but pinned up so it wouldn't show under the trench coat. Under the wedding dress, she is wearing men's trousers and shoes.

MARY (Explaining, with a shrug)  
It was too big to pack.

Just at that moment POLICEMAN 1 walks back in. MARY freezes. POLICEMAN 1 stops, stares.

POLICEMAN 1 (Shakes his head)  
Theatre people.

POLICEMAN 1 strolls back to the desk. MARY whips the coat to THE CRIMINALS.

CRIMINAL 1 (Points to dress)  
That's an even better disguise. I want that one.

CRIMINAL 2 (Bundling him towards the Gents)  
Shut up willya!

As they leave, JOEY enters looking shell-shocked. MARY fans out the money looking goofily pleased. But JOEY talks first.

JOEY  
Mary. You forgot to pack the baby.

MARY  
No, I didn't. I put him in the suitcase with the underwear.

JOEY  
He's nowhere! Think Mary. Where did you last leave little Haysoos?

MARY  
Uh – uh – uh. I took him shopping last Thursday.

JOEY  
No, no, when you were packing Mary. Think!

MARY  
I can't! (Pause) I know: you you know that.  
First, I... I put him with the coats. And then I put him with your hiking boots. And then... and then...  
(She starts to hop up and down)  
I think I went to get some cans of beer.

JOEY  
*Ay carumba! Madre de Dios!* You left the baby in the icebox!

They both freeze.

Enter SALOME in travelling two piece suit. She looks rueful. She holds the infant Jesus, a rigid plastic doll, wrapped tightly in swaddling. It is dusted over with frost and has a icicle dripping from its nose.

SALOME  
Forget something?

MARY AND JOEY run to her in relief.

MARY  
Ah, thank you, dear!

SALOME (Casually pushes the parcel at MARY)  
Aw, I always wanted to see the pyramids anyway.

Enter EZEKIEL MERTZ, Salome's husband played by series regular William Frawley. Aged, plump, incorrigible. He wears his fishing hat festooned with fly decoys and carries his fishing rod.

ZEKE MERTZ  
Hey Joe, lets catch some Nile fish!

SALOME (Ruefully)  
I guess I brought *two* kids with me.

A traditional crescendo of MARY scene-changing music. The grey heart closes like a gate.



COMMERCIAL BREAK.

Ads for Ephesus brand Holy Water and Nabisco unleavened wafers follow.

### Five minutes later: Interior: Egyptian Customs

JOEY stands calmly, almost smugly in line. Beside him, arm in arm, MARY still wears her wedding dress, trousers and men's shoes. As the Holy Family advance in line, the Wedding March plays. SALOME AND ZEKE stand stonily trying to look normal. They arrive at the front desk trying to look unconcerned. JOEY passes all four papers to the police

POLICEMAN 1 (Glances between the bride, the groom, the dress and the baby)  
Kinda late to be getting married, isn't it?

JOEY (Tries to look cool)  
Never too late.

POLICEMAN 1 (Reads the blue folder and says in disbelief)  
Rhinocolura? You're going to *stay* in Rhinocolura?

MARY  
We want to see the rhinoceroses!

POLICEMAN 1 (Smiles at his colleagues)  
Rhinoceroses? You mean hippos, lady. We got hippos in Egypt, but only in the Nile. Rhinocolura's a seaside town.

MARY (Childishly disappointed. She stomps her feet)  
What! Are you sure?

SALOME  
Then why did they call it Rhinocolura?

The three POLICEMEN glance at each other.

## POLICEMAN 1

Lady. Take it from me. You do *not* want to know. Now g'wan, get outta here before we change our minds.

All four scarper, exiting left. The policemen shake their heads.

## POLICEMAN 1

What kinda idiots go for their honeymoon in a prison camp?

Suddenly, through the door marked Egypt, TERRORISTS rush in. They wear army fatigues and ski masks. They are armed with semi-automatic weapons. LEAD TERRORIST jams the barrel of a gun under the cheek of the goat.

## LEAD TERRORIST

Free our colleagues, or the goat gets it!

## MAN WITH GOAT

No, not my goat, take me instead!

## LEAD TERRORIST

All right.

He shoots MAN WITH GOAT just behind the ear. THE POLICEMEN charge from behind the desk, drawing their weapons. The scene fades amid sounds of screams, gunfire and carnage. The angels laugh and applaud.

### Interior: two hours later: the lobby of the Rhinocolura inn

The camera pulls back from a notice on the door. It says "Rhinocolura Hell-town." We see a bleak and barren lobby with a front desk.

Behind the desk, THE PROPRIETOR stares at the pointlessness of his life. He is dressed like a depressed motel operator in a forgotten midwest town off the main road: casual shirt, a string tie, a tiny moustache. His nose has been cut off. There is a gaping hole in his face.

An utterly depressed and dejected MAID shuffles in, round shouldered, flat footed. There is a cobweb in her hair. She too has had her nose cut off. She speaks tonelessly, snuffling back drool.)

## MAID

Has *any* food come in Mr Ramses?

PROPRIETOR (Sighs. He sounds like Boris Karloff with a bad cold.) They want us to starve.

MAID (Nods forlornly. Those are the breaks. Shuffles around to leave.)

Maybe there's a fig on the fig tree. Then I'll check the rotten horse's head and see if it's got any eels yet.

## PROPRIETOR

Perhaps there's some cheese in the mousetraps.

THE MAID exits. THE PROPRIETOR ducks down behind the counter.

THE FOUR FRIENDS enter, glancing at each other in abject terror. The drive through what passes for the town has evidently been quite enough to unnerve them. The infant Jesus is bandaged so tightly that he has gone beetroot red. SALOME and MARY clutch each other.

## SALOME

Mary where did you book us?

## ZEKE

Sheesh! I've been in nicer camel stables.

## MARY

They said it was a Hilton.

JOEY (Shakes head, points to the sign)

It says Hell-town, Mary.

There is the sound of a mousetrap snapping shut. They all jump. Then the PROPRIETOR stands up, nibbling a hardened waxy lump of cheese. Mary sees his ruined face, squawks shut a scream, and turns away.

PROPRIETOR (In mild undertaker tones)

Can I help you?

JOEY (Masters himself)

We would like a room please.

PROPRIETOR (Startled, incredulous)

You'd *like* a room? Here?

This is not the reaction JOEY expects. He's Cuban and still sensitive about being snubbed. The shirt he's wearing is a little loud, but surely they can see he is prosperous, middle class? He tries to sound businesslike, used to hotels.

JOEY

The name is Ricardo. You should have a reservation in my wife's name. I'd also like a double room for our friends.

PROPRIETOR (Flicks his eye over a register. He is stricken with sympathy, and breaks the news as if someone has died.)

Oh, dear, I'm so, so sorry. I'm afraid that we do have a reservation for you.

MARY (She has finally summoned courage to speak. Her face is twisted with horrified sympathy at the man's disfigurement. She blurts out...) I don't mean to be nosey but...

Realizing what she has said, MARY spins back around.

JOEY (Trying to explain and apologize)

You must excuse my wife, she's always sticking her...

Now it's his turn to stop.

PROPRIETOR (Stands taller, eyes narrowing)

Nose. You were going to say nose. (slurp) Do think that's funny?

JOEY (Spooked, but tries to look casual)

No. No, no, no.

ZEKE

No. We just wondered why you had a hole in your face.

(SALOME elbows him)

Oooh!

PROPRIETOR

You know why they call this place... (slurp) Rhinocolura?

JOEY shakes his head. He doesn't want to know.

PROPRIETOR

It means "noses are cut off". Everyone they send here. They cut off our noses. So even if we try to leave, people will know who we are.

MARY (Asking the only possible question under such circumstances) What kind of a hotel is this?

PROPRIETOR (Mournfully)

It isn't a hotel madam. It's a prison. In exile, on the border, surrounded by nothing but desert. No food, no water. You have no idea what blowing sand and salt water do to exposed sinuses.

PROPRIETOR reaches down under the counter and takes out a huge pair of gardening shears.



PROPRIETOR

Hold still. It only takes a moment and doesn't hurt that much.

JOEY, MARY, SAL and ZEKE back away.

JOEY (Gabbling)

I... I... think we'll stay somewhere else.

PROPRIETOR (Pleading, advancing on them with the shears like Frankenstein's monster)

Oh let me do it! It's the only part of the job I enjoy.

They scream and run off.

### **Exterior: immediately afterwards: outside the Rhinocolura Hell-town**

The burnished Silverstream trailer gleams. A tall, fat man with masses of curly, graying hair and unsightly stubble wears a long Egyptian gelabiya robe that emphasizes his tummy. There are fish and bloodstains down it, and he holds aloft an umbrella that looks like a broken bat. He twirls as if were a parasol. His nose is missing as well, but he has inserted a beautiful cactus flower into the hole. The flower blooms in his face, where his nose should be.

The angelic chorus breaks into an applause of recognition of this episode's guest star, Charles Laughton, playing the character OSKAR.

THE FOUR FRIENDS scamper shaking towards the trailer. OSKAR hails them affably. The voice is Irish, but refined, weighty, airy, pompous and fleet of wit at one and the same time.

OSKAR

Good evening. Are you the owners of this magnificent vehicle?

MARY sees his face, cries aloud in fear. MARY and SALOME bundle themselves into the car.

OSKAR

It glisters like a chariot of Apollo himself. Are you votives of that mighty god? Or is Venus your particular deity?

OSKAR's eyes alight on JOEY and seem both to melt with desire and burrow their way deeper into him. JOEY is at that moment trembling his way through his pockets to find his keys. OSKAR takes JOEY's tiny trembling hands in both of his big ones to calm them.

OSKAR

I mean you no harm, I am victim of this place myself. You are not prisoners, but travellers, am I correct?

MARY (Clambering into the front seat)

And we're travelling right out of here!

OSKAR

I have a charming seaside residence. Not what you're used to of course. But it is outside of town, and safe.

MARY (Clutching the baby, from a position of safety in the front seat) We're driving as far away from Rhinocolura as we can get.

OSKAR

My dear. You are surrounded by the Sinai desert. It is a day and a half drive to the nearest town, which I regret to say is Pelousium. And that means City of Mud. My beach on the other hand is sandy, cool, and lined with palm trees. All I ask in return is carriage in this chariot of silver. And your company. I live alone.

JOEY (Glances first at MARY)

We can give you a lift if you need one.

OSKAR bows. Huge and amorous he takes hold of JOEY's hand again just as JOEY is about to enter.

OSKAR (His eyebrows flicker meaningfully)

My name is Oskar, and I am of the Greek persuasion.

OSKAR crowds into the front seat next to MARY. MARY shakes his hand. When JOEY climbs in to drive, OSKAR's huge thighs press against his and with overflowing heart, OSKAR stares at his face. JOEY begins to look uncomfortable. He starts the car.

### **Exterior, night: Oskar's beach shack**

The soundtrack is now whining, sickly Hawaiian guitar luau music. There is a campfire in a studio set, with silhouettes of palm trees and the recorded sound of surf. OSKAR's shack is three palm frond walls and a huge table made of a door set on shipwreck timbers. Overhead there hangs a slightly withered dried shark.

ZEKE poses for SALOME's camera with a fish he has just caught. MARY and JOEY sit together by the campfire, roasting marshmallows. MARY now wears a casual shirt and shorts. She sighs and cuddles JOEY's arm.

MARY

Isn't this heaven?

JOEY (Less pleased)

It's OK. But we're sleeping in the trailer.

MARY

Aw, Joey, please. Why can't we sleep out under the stars?

JOEY

Because I can lock the door. Mary, honey. Just don't leave me alone with him, all right?

MARY

Joey. Don't be silly. He doesn't have any gardening shears.

JOEY

Honey. Some men are different. You know what I mean?

ZEKE (Teasing him)

Aw go on, Joe, I'm sure Oskar has plenty to show ya.

OSKAR enters wearing only a posing pouch. His eyes burn in JOEY's direction. JOEY shifts closer to his wife. MARY seems oblivious.

MARY

I was just admiring your huge, hanging shark!

OSKAR

Ah yes. He is my sole companion. He was washed up, like everything else I own. I call him Bosie. I'm sorry if things are a bit rough for you.

MARY

Oh we're used to it. I gave birth in barn, didn't I, honey? My husband is a bandleader, you may have heard of him, Joey Ricardo?

OSKAR certainly has. His ears seem to prick up.

MARY

Anyway, my husband had a residency in the most delightful little place in a town called Bethlehem, but, there was no room in the inn...

OSKAR (Going weak at the knees. He has to sit down.)

Bethlehem? You said Bethlehem. And the Ricardos! Of course. All the Ricardos are of the house of David.

JOEY (Nods yes, unimpressed by his own family tree)

Even in Cuba.

MARY (Pleased, preens, pinning up her hair)  
Honey, I think Oskar knows about the prophecies. Well, Oskar. It's true. Little Haysoos is the Anointed One.

MARY holds up the absolutely immobile, bandaged, red-faced infant. JESUS is bundled so tightly he can't breathe, and his eyes have started to pop out.

MARY  
Isn't he cute?

OSKAR (It takes a moment for OSKAR to respond)  
He's divine.

MARY  
D'ja wanna hold him for a second?

OSKAR nods, as if there were china balanced on his head, and gingerly takes hold of the bundle. MARY spins on her butt, to show off her show-girl legs.

MARY  
I think I'm going to go for a swim.

JOEY (In alarm)  
I'm coming with you!

MARY  
No, no, I'm sure you men have things you want to do together.

ZEKE  
There's plenty Oskar wants to do.

SALOME  
I'm up for a swim. Come on, let's go!

Eagerly, the women exit. JOEY stares with great distrust at OSKAR.

ZEKE (Leaning forward, puts hand on JOEY's shoulder)  
Actually Joey, I've never told you this, but I think you're kind of cute.

JOEY (Voice breaking)  
Ay-yay-yay. Mary! I'm going swimming too. Mary wait!  
JOEY runs off into the darkness.

OSKAR  
Mr Mertz. That was naughty.

ZEKE  
Wasn't it though? Well, Oskar, I guess you're left holding the baby. Me, I'm going fishing.

Exit

OSKAR (Starts to unwind the swaddling and talks to the infant)  
Well, Little One. Perhaps you're the reason why I ended up in Rhinocolura. Can you hear me? Can you understand?

There is a rather clumsy edit, and the bundle is plastic no longer, but a fat and liberated chuckling baby JESUS. On cue, the angelic chorus goes "Awe."

OSKAR  
I was sent here for the terrible crime of translating the Talmud into Greek. I called what was beautiful by its name, and that which our masters told us was beautiful, I called ugly. For this, they did me the most enormous favour. They stripped me back to nothing. I was left with this: sun and sea and trees and flying fish. I had to learn not to write, not to expect fame, to accept loneliness and disgrace. Never be tempted by the world of men, Little One. There is nothing in it.

JESUS stares at him with wide but comprehending eyes. Fade.

## Exterior, a few minutes later: Oskar's beach hut

MARY and SALOME come back refreshed, towelling their hair, though this being a TV show, every hair is place. JOEY returns under layers of towels: towels over his shoulders, round his chest, round his waist. He eyes OSKAR suspiciously.

OSKAR is suckling the babe. The infant clings to his breast with his mouth.

MARY (Cheerful, happy)  
Well that's one way of keepin' 'im quiet.

OSKAR (In a stunned, slightly wistful voice)  
I've passed milk.

MARY  
That means he likes you

Airily Mary takes JESUS back.

SALOME  
You should have left that to us.  
(Wrinkling her nose at unpleasantness)  
I hope you didn't have to change him or anything.

OSKAR  
I think he changed me. I started to tell him all sorts of things. I'm sorry, but I told him that the family is an unwarranted limitation on love. Taking care of one's own is no more virtuous than taking care of one's self. It's necessary, but it's not a good if it means you cease to love other people.

MARY (Impressed)  
Joey honey listen to this guy talk!

JOEY simply growls because he has a towel clenched in his teeth in an effort to screen himself. He is completely occupied with changing back into his trousers without showing OSKAR a single square inch of burnished Latin flesh. He hops up and down in the sand. Enter ZEKE, who sees JOEY hopping.

ZEKE (To JOEY)  
Hiya gorgeous.  
Harassed JOEY hops further away.

MARY (Looking for pen)  
I gotta write all this down. Whatya say?

OSKAR  
I think I meant that all men are brothers.  
Brow furrowed, MARY writes in her address book. JOEY hops into the range of the camera, one leg only in his trousers, clutching towels that are beginning to strip-tease off his shoulders.

OSKAR  
And that all men should love each other.

JOEY gives a little scream of panic, and hops further away.

MARY (Finished writing, she looks up as if famished and demands)  
What else?

OSKAR (His eyes seem to swim in firelight)  
Tell him when he's older. Warn him. We are indeed punished for the harm we do in life. But we're punished more for doing good.

JOEY stumbles showering towels and he falls, naked, his showbiz chest shaved clean, his trousers around his knees, onto OSKAR's lap. OSKAR looks delighted. ZEKE roars, and slaps his knee.

## Exterior. The next morning: Oskar's beach hut

The silver trailer is crammed into the set behind the palm frond wall, and there are multiple shadows in all directions from the studio lighting. MARY is busy, tongue pressed between her lips, pulling swaddling tighter than a girdle around the infant. She holds up him, and his tongue is now protruding. OSKAR has spruced himself up, and is back in his filthy gelabiya and would-be parasol.

OSKAR

Goodbye then, my dear.

MARY (Chuckles with affection)

Goodbye Oskar, thanks for everything.

MARY stands.

OSKAR (Trying not to be shy)

I hope you didn't mind my preaching.

MARY

Oh-ho, of course not. He won't become the Son of God just by listening to me.

MARY takes OSKAR's face in both her hands and kisses his cheeks, and smiles at him.

MARY

I'm so sorry Joey didn't sleep with you.

OSKAR

Perhaps it was for the best. Is he *still* barricaded in the trailer?

MARY

'Fraid so. You know how these macho Cubans are.

MARY shakes out the beach blanket, collects the basket. At the last moment, she remembers the baby, who resembles a bandaged Coca-Cola bottle.

MARY

Oops. Nearly forgot.

Everything before this line is fiction. But there is no reason technologically why the document database, soundtrack and all, should not exist now. By my reckoning, it would contain 1,533,000 or even over 2 million words<sup>†</sup>, the equivalent of about ten novels or more than the rest of my writing life. It compares with the task of writing all 179 episodes of *I Love Lucy*.

Interactive fiction is based on a principle of redundancy. It must provide material, good material, in great quantities that may never be visited or read by anyone. That is expensive. The redundancy imitates life, which writes itself on the fly without assistance. Ultimately, interactive fiction will need, like life, to be self-generating.

In the meanwhile, since I can only write part of *Family*, would you prefer that:

☐ I write one coherent parameter choice for all 7 locales at a time (ie a consistent story all the way to the end), then start all over with a different single parameter set. This could mean the first example would go through all seven episodes first using one parameter set.

☐ I write a mix of the more interesting parameter sets for the first locale, followed by another mix for the second. This would mean the first upload would consist of say three variations on Israel/Nativity. This would be followed by two different variations for Rhinocolura, et al

☐ I write a mix that would upload only one episode per locale, each using different parameters. This mix would take the two current examples and add five more variations in different locales

☐ I consider the Holy Family as other famous TV characters, for example *The*

MARY tosses the infant casually into the basket, puts on her sunglasses and waves goodbye. The angels applaud what they know is the last scene with this week's guest star.

## Interior, a half hour later: the Ricardo car on the road

JOEY and MARY look relaxed and cheerful, with SAL and ZEKE in the back seat. Artificial shadows pass over their faces, and they bounce themselves slightly up and down in the seats.

JOEY

Well, darling. Where next?

MARY

They said somewhere there's a cat show or something.

JOEY

No, no. That's the festival of Bubastis the cat god. They hold it every year in Zagazig.

MARY (Amused)

Zagazig? I thought that was a cigarette paper.

MARY lights up a spliff. JOEY looks at her, his eyes alive with love. He likes all the scrapes she gets him into, he wouldn't want to live any other way, with anyone else. Out of a fullness of heart, he starts to sing.

JOEY (Making up the words)

*I'm just sailing along with the breeze!*

*Wind in the trees,*

*Shorts show my knees,*

*I know that life is a tease....*

We see the trailer pass us with a roar, the sound of song within.

## Ext. That moment: the sea shore

OSKAR stands naked on the sand, tall and fat, a thicket of white chest hair, shrivelled cock, age spots on his arms, and he stares, stricken and alone. The waves break.

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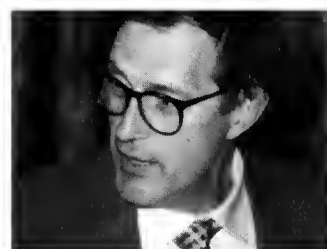
*Flintstones* or, more adventurously, *My Three Sons* starring Fred MacMurray as the Virgin Joseph and three teenage actors as the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

☐ I don't write anything else in *Family* at all.

Answer my questions, contribute ideas or even a episode if you like.  
Respond to: [Ryman.Worksltd.@btinternet.com](mailto:Ryman.Worksltd.@btinternet.com).

Please.

<sup>†</sup> To clarify the mathematics behind this assertion: There are two Lucy factors (L), which multiplies the three Divinity factors (D) to six combinations. All these six are multiplied by the four Flight factors (F) to a possible 24 variations. Only some of those 24 variations are variable again by the Christ-awareness factors (C). Only two Divinity factors are capable of modification by the three Christ awareness factors. So the two L factors x only two D factors x all four F factors yields only 16 variations to be further modified by the three C factors for 48 further possible combinations. This means there are 24 variations plus 48 variations plus the single cancel-all Islamic variation which total 73 possible combinations per episode locale of which there are seven.  $7 \times 73 = 511$  episodes in the database. If each of these episodes average only 3,000 words in length, that makes a total of 1,533,000 words.



Geoff Ryman's stories appeared in every issue of *SF Nexus*, and have appeared in many issues of *Interzone*. His novel for the Internet, 253, is available on-line at [www.ryman-novel.com](http://www.ryman-novel.com), and will appear in book form from HarperCollins later in 1998.



America at night seen from space, the lights of the seaboardsgirdling the continent. The camera pulls back through the atmosphere, past the planets and out into deep space. As it does so a babble of radio voices are heard which, as the viewpoint moves further away from Earth, become older until they thin out and end in the dot-dash of morse code. The camera continues its way past nebulae in complete silence for a while before fading out.

Or at least there's complete silence on the soundtrack. The effect was rather undermined at the ABC Luton where I saw *Contact* (the opening scene of which I have described above) by the audience's clear discomfort at an opening which not only failed to deliver any action – or even people – but, to many of them, was clearly unintelligible. Aside from its beauty – and this is a beautiful scene, CGI effects at their most cosmic – the scene serves as a taster for a plot development later in the film: when the aliens first get in touch with us they announce their presence by sending back our TV transmissions. It's possible that some members of the audience made the connection to the opening when this became clear but I suspect there was a good portion of them who were still unable to work out the meaning of the opening scene after the film was finished.

Let's face it, it's a long time since a Hollywood film with an expectation of gathering in \$100m minimum assumed (however misguided) its audience to be capable of sitting through an opening scene which is not only poetic and requires some interpretation but is never overtly explained. What makes the scene particularly work for me is the implication of the silence. It is rare enough to find any silence in Hollywood films, and so deserves praise in itself, but more than this, this is a silence which speaks of our insignificance in the universe and yet of our achievement in making some sort of mark. It also takes us on a form of time travel; the camera has led us a century and more into the past and is still travelling when it fades out, suggesting we could go *waaaay* back if we want to. Pretty impressive for the first two minutes of a Warner Brothers movie.

*Contact* never really lives up to its opening, although there's a couple of scenes further in which come close. However, the film as a whole is thematically compromised in its handling of the science vs religion debate embodied in Jodie Foster's character. Director Robert Zemeckis deserves praise for having the guts to give it a go (although admittedly after the success of *Forrest Gump* he could have got a green light for a remake of Andy Warhol's oeuvre if he'd asked nicely) even though it's clear that he

# Stars in my Budget like grains of Gold

Keith Knight  
considers  
sf films of 1997

foolishly would like *Contact* to be thought of in comparison with *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Kubrick's masterpiece is probably the last big-budget sf film which demanded its audience think about what they're seeing, rather than just go with the plot, and the opening of *Contact* has the same pace and feel as much of *2001*. There's a more blatant homage later in the film in a version of the star gate sequence when Foster travels through space-time to meet the aliens. The SFX have changed to make the space-time continuum look more like a wormhole but the link to the earlier film is clear when Zemeckis throws in a close-up of Foster's eye which looks just like Keir Dullea's in Kubrick's film. More generally, however, this is a film which is serious about getting its science right (something that's never bothered a lot of sf film makers) and takes its time in saying so. At two and a half hours it overstates its welcome (you

could hear the groans around the cinema when the film's coda began) but you know it wants to think of itself as an important film. When all's said and done, however, it's *lèse-majesté* to invoke *2001* and the film collapses under the weight of the comparison, crippled by its longueurs, its thematic inadequacies and a dull love interest.

Although *Contact* invites it, comparing any film to *2001* is unfair, as we may never see a film as innovative, majestic and demanding again. Fairer therefore to see where *Contact* fits among its peers. By my reckoning, six major films that are full square sf movies have been released in the UK in 1997 by major studios – *Mars Attacks!*, *The Fifth Element*, *Men in Black*, *The Lost World*, *Event Horizon* and *Contact*. These are all big-budget, effects-heavy movies and the majority of them are made by directors with a track record in sf films. This is increasingly becoming a specialist area, not I suspect because these men (and they do tend to be men, Kathryn Bigelow, director of the criminally underrated *Strange Days* a few years ago, excepted) have a particular feel for sf as a genre, but because they're capable of handling special effects and understanding how the final film will look once the SFX have been added. The widespread introduction of CGI effects in the last two decades has significantly changed the director's role on this type of film from one who marshalls people and props on set to one who knows what that big spaceship crashing in the distance will look like in the context of the actors standing in front of the blue screen. This is something of a speciality and you wouldn't entrust your megabucks budget to someone with no feel for this sort of thing – I fear we'll never see Mike Leigh's *Alien 5* or Robert Altman's contribution to the *Star Wars* series.

None of this year's films can be deemed a resounding success, but there is a clear wit in each of them, evidenced through the production design which is often quite wonderful. The enjoyment to be derived from sf movies is now almost exclusively visual, delivered through the increasingly sophisticated SFX – the aerial traffic in *The Fifth Element*, the aliens in *Men in Black* and *Mars Attacks!*, the dinosaurs in *The Lost World* – the quality of which would have been unobtainable even at the beginning of the decade. In addition, thought has obviously been put into the incidentals of these movies. The set design for *Event Horizon* – whose spaceship looks like a cathedral consecrated to the wrong side – works splendidly until you start to ask why they would have built a ship like that in the first place. And, shocking as it may be to consider, there's indications of sf being sartorially hip. For *The Fifth Element*, Luc Besson hired

Jean-Paul Gaultier to create his usual costume mix of inspiring and appalling, while *Men in Black* seemed to trade almost entirely on Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones in black suits and Ray-Bans. Merchandising is, of course, now as important to a big movie's success as the number of bums it puts on multiplex seats, and if Ray-Bans' sales have increased by as much as one expects them to have from the number of references they received in the movie, we can expect this trend to continue. The young Obi-Wan Kenobi in Nike trainers anyone?

All this year's releases are to some degree derivative of other sf movies. *The Lost World* went slightly too far in being a virtual carbon copy of its megahit predecessor, although there was enough of Spielberg's natural film-making talent to keep me happy. The scenes with Julianne Moore suspended on cracking glass over a chasm, and the pattern made as the dinosaurs ran through the long grass towards the line of humans were almost too good for a movie which seemed to have been made on autopilot. *Event Horizon* rummaged through sf and horror film history, pinching from *Alien*, *Solaris*, *The Haunting*, *The Exorcist*, *The Shining*, *Lifeorce* and even *Don't Look Now* in one scene. It was also clear from the beginning of *The Fifth Element* that Luc Besson had watched *Stargate* once too often. The references to other sf films is probably inevitable, although *Event Horizon* tips its cap to too many for my taste. More interesting is how few of these films relate to written sf works. *Men in Black* is based on a comic book as, to all intents and purposes given its great visual debt to *bande dessinée*, is *The Fifth Element*, while *Mars Attacks!*, for Chrissakes, is based on trading cards, albeit ones heavily influenced by '50s sf movies. Only *Contact* and *The Lost World* are based on unpublished novels.

The lack of big-budget films based on my favourite sf stories has long been a matter of annoyance for me and no doubt many others who regard sf as primarily a literary source – I'm sure most *Interzone* readers could produce a list of books or stories they would like to see filmed but it's clear that my dreams of seeing, say, Samuel R. Delany's *Nova* or Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* brought to the screen in a respectful way are doomed. It's indicative that *Contact* and *The Lost World* are based on books which were written with at least one eye on the screenplay, *Contact* having been expanded from an original film treatment, and *The Lost World* being the sequel to a book which became a quite popular film. I gave up on the book of *Contact*, finding it clunkily written and uninvolved, and although I haven't felt the need to dip into *The*

*Lost World*, I've read enough Michael Crichton to know that the writing will be at best serviceable. In a sense, reading these books is beside the point; both *Contact* and *The Lost World* exist as ideas to be filmed, not as texts to be mulled over. Their publication in book form serves only to advertise the film in the way that novelizations do. They are spinoffery despite the fact that they existed prior to the film, as much part of the merchandising effort as *Man in Black*'s Ray-Bans.

Sf film, in common with the rest of Hollywood, has had to dumb down to meet the needs of the industry and, arguably, the needs of the audience – the response to the opening of *Contact* detailed above certainly suggests that the modern audience does not expect to have to think on entering a cinema. To base films on complex unpublished texts must set alarm bells ringing in the office of any production company and it's noticeable that only small production companies will now take this risk, as with *The English Patient* and *Crash*. Because sf films tend to need bigger budgets to deliver the necessary effects the risks are proportionally greater. That this year's crop of sf films were on the whole reasonable is a tribute to some idiosyncratic and talented filmmakers, but none of them have scripts which are more than serviceable. This is a trend which one can only see continuing. With the quality of CGI effects already at the stage where weekly TV shows such as *Babylon 5* and the *Star Trek* series deliver effects of a quality rarely seen in cinema 10 years ago, sf film will have to do more than pull rabbits out of hats to encourage people through the door. This will be done through state of the art special effects that will take precedence over any storyline, as long as the paying public are prepared to put up with it. Recent history suggests that audiences are: *Twister*, *Batman* and *Robin* and *The Lost World*, which had minimal plots, proved huge box office successes. Ironically, of course, the development of CGI now means that sf stories which had been previously unfilmable could now be made; it is difficult to think of anything that CGI could not now attempt. That the only film in the pipeline based on a pre-published story is Paul Verhoeven's film of Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* speaks volumes – a simple tale, in a war film mode easily recognizable by audiences which will doubtless be pitched at the level of a computer game. Most sf texts are just too complex to be easily adapted to a two hour film and run the risk of being severely compromised if they do get made – *Dune*, *Total Recall* and *Blade Runner* (whatever the merits of the latter, they are palpably not those of Dick's novel) are evidence of this. Film-makers therefore tend to prefer to make films from original stories,

often the director's own vision, and interestingly these are the films which have proved among the most financially successful in recent sf film history – 2001, *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters*, *ET*, *Alien(s)*, *Mad Max*, *Independence Day*, *Stargate*. Although based on ideas in common use in sf writing, these are all written specifically for the screen and can therefore be tailored to the budget and technology of the day without any outside expectation. Why take on a text which can only be expected to disappoint people if the film does not live up to their vision of it, and which needs to be distilled from some complex plot? Better to write something yourself that you know the techies in the backroom can deliver and the audience will be capable of following.

So where does this leave the future of sf film? CGI developments mean that it will continue to be the dominant blockbuster art-form, and the release of the next *Star Wars* trilogy could well lead to even more of them being made. But don't expect anything that does more than tickle your eyeballs. The only directors with the clout to make what they want whenever they want, and who are likely to deliver anything other than space opera, are Kubrick and Spielberg; and although these may yet spring surprises (Kubrick's long-mooted *AI* is rumoured to be in pre-pre-production – he's reported to be waiting until the quality of special effects reaches the level necessary to do justice to the story), their examples are not likely to be followed. The best we can hope for are moments like the opening of *Contact*, scenes that deliver the sense of wonder we find in written sf and that don't talk down to the audience. It will have to be enough.

Keith Knight wrote one well-received critical piece on film for *SF Nexus*, and I am very pleased he found time out from his busy life to produce another here. He is seen here with his wife, Jennifer (also a contributor to *SF Nexus*, as Jennifer Steele) and their children Katharine and Sam.



Photo: Paul Brazier

There's no escaping it. No review of Peter F. Hamilton's *The Neutronium Alchemist* (Macmillan, £17.99) can possibly avoid mention of the book's size. It is, frankly, a big bugger, weighing in at over 3lbs and nearly 1,000 pages long. And when you consider that it is just the middle book of Hamilton's "Night's Dawn" trilogy, merely one of three similarly proportioned volumes, then the full extent of the author's ambition becomes apparent. No doubt about it: in terms of sheer length, this is a monumental work.

Physical dimensions aside, it's a work of vast scale as well. The sweep of the narrative spans seemingly the entire universe, encompassing numerous cultures, races and planets. Everything happens on a hyperbolic level. Nuclear weapons are tossed around as casually as firecrackers. Stars explode. Planets disappear. People die in their droves. This is the space-opera equivalent of Wagner – grand, bombastic, and very, very long.

But size, as every remotely insecure male should know, isn't everything. *The Neutronium Alchemist* has the scope and the grandeur, but it also has the fine detail that puts its massively broad strokes into perspective.

As those who have read its predecessor, *The Reality Dysfunction*, will know, the denizens of Hamilton's hyper-technological 26th century have encountered a problem with which their science appears unable to cope. Dead souls have discovered a means of re-entering the realm of the living, by possessing the bodies of the recently deceased. When they do so, they find themselves capable of feats of "energetic" power which are indistinguishable from – and probably identical to – magic. The "beyond" from which they have escaped is an enervating, hellish limbo, and so naturally they have no desire to return there, and equally naturally they want to rescue those who are still trapped there. And the only way to do this is, of course, to kill more of the living in order to create more bodies to be possessed.

*The Reality Dysfunction* concluded with one world already entirely under the control of the possessed and several others heading that way. Without preface or preamble (new readers are not advised to start here), *The Neutronium Alchemist* picks up where the previous book left off. Quinn Dexter, member of a Satanic-style sect and the man who inadvertently triggered off the whole crisis in the first place, has relocated to English-ethnic planet Norfolk, where he is in the process of furthering his nefarious scheme to bring about the onset of an apocalyptic Night. Meanwhile Dr Alkad Mzu, last seen escaping spectacularly from the artificial habitat Tranquillity, is on a quest to retrieve the doomsday weapon she invented, the titular Alchemist, a bomb capable of destroying a star.

## Galactic Götter- dämmerung

James Lovegrove

And, 200 pages in, Hamilton finally reintroduces *The Reality Dysfunction*'s main protagonist, Joshua Calvert, a reluctantly heroic starship captain whose piloting skills saved the lives of several children at the end of the previous book and, in this book, make him the best candidate for going after Dr Mzu and preventing her from exacting her revenge on the planet Omuta, whose inhabitants were responsible for committing near-total genocide on her own race 30 years earlier.

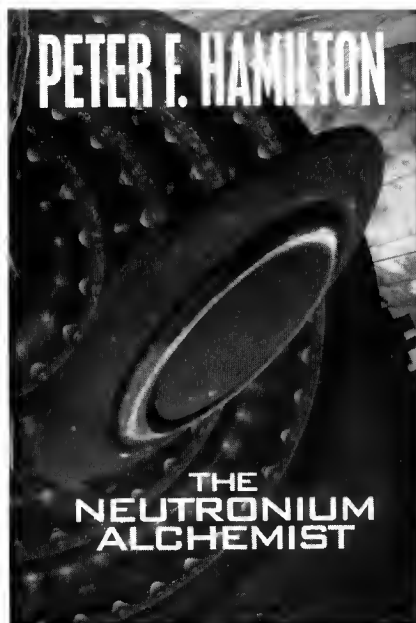
For the most part, Hamilton marshals his cast of more than 150 characters with adroitness and skill as he takes them (and us) through a kaleidoscope of shifting allegiances, playing numerous variations on his basic theme of magic versus science – the former limitless and lawless, the latter governed by strict rules – and exploring to the full the possibilities inherent in the situation. His world-building is thorough and convincing, and where other authors might be



content to let the central conceit of the dead coming back to life remain an unexplained McGuffin ("They just can, all right?"), for Hamilton the whys and wherefores are essential to the story. It would seem that divining the very nature of the "beyond" will provide the key to resolving the crisis.

Of the dozens of concurrent subplots, the most interesting involves the reappearance of the soul of Al Capone, who, acclimatizing quickly to the future, sets about building up his Organization anew, and this time has his sights set on running an entire solar system rather than just one city. There is also the appearance of a mysterious, shadowy figure who would seem to be setting himself up as Quinn Dexter's nemesis, and whose identity Hamilton does not divulge.

Inevitably, with so much going on at once, at times the plot convolutions become a little confusing and the relentless pace and intermittent bursts of violence a little bewildering. On the whole Hamilton keeps the many balls he is juggling in the air, but occasionally one drops to the floor with a thud, for instance when Joshua discovers he has a half-brother. It's a plot-twist of the same order of magnitude of duffness as Luke and Leia in *Star Wars* finding out that they're siblings – the stuff of Victorian potboilers. Indeed, Joshua is the one character who, throughout both volumes of the trilogy so far, has consistently struck a false note. He is callow, shallow, for no obvious reason irresistible to women, profligate with his sexual favours (he has managed to impregnate not one but two of the principal female characters), and prone to major cock-ups and errors of judgement. He remains fundamentally noble, and we're meant to like him in spite of, and probably because





of, his shortcomings, but basically he's a bit of a prat, a trad-sf space-borne stud-bucket hero very much out of keeping with Hamilton's otherwise commendably 1990s sensibilities. Imagine Captain Kirk, pre-corset and pre-wig, turning up in an episode

of *Next Generation*, and you will get the general idea.

These quibbles aside, *The Neutronium Alchemist* more than adequately fulfils its task of forming a bridge between *The Reality Dysfunction* and the finale of the trilogy, *The Naked*

*God* (a title notably lacking in the polysyllabic portentousness of the other two). Word is, Hamilton's next series is going to run to at least five volumes, so catch him now, while he's still concise.

James Lovegrove

After dealing with Haydn Middleton's "Mordred" trilogy last month I took up Patrick McCormack's *Albion: The Last Companion* (Raven, £7.99) with some relief. Though not a perfectly straight approach to the Matter of Britain, it's a lot less oblique. Raven presents it as an historical novel rather than as fantasy, but since Budoc, the companion of the title, has taken up the *metier* of a holy man, and is skilful with the scrying-bowl (among other Druidic magics) I class it as such.

The atmosphere is autumnal; Arthur is ten years dead, all the brief glories of his imperium are passing out of memory into myth, and those who come after him are, in their own and each others' eyes, lesser men. They know well enough that things would be better if they could only unite against the Saxon and Irish incursions, but they have the best of reasons to distrust each other; no new leader seems likely to arise. In so far as they give thought to such matters, they realize that a Dark Age is upon them.

The book is discursively written, with a great many older men either reminiscing at length for the benefit of younger ones or recalling the hazards of their youth, so that the effect is at times almost like *Puck of Pook's Hill*, the more so as McCormack's voice is dignified and elegiac as befits the subject-matter. Against that, it lacks variety of style, so that the varying characters of the speakers don't tend to emerge. But he's a master of the telling detail; whoever is speaking, his tale always enthral.

It's a story of three generations. Accident brings together Budoc, who is old, Gorthyn and Nai, mature warriors though too young to have fought under Arthur's standard, and the youthful Eurgain and Ceolric. Ceolric is a Saxon, but his people have lived at peace with Arthur on land granted to them by treaty. Despite ancient enmity, they are not a direct threat as is Eremon of the Scotti (Irish), and the possibility of love between the young people hints delicately at the destiny awaiting Arthur's erstwhile realm.

Eremon is an excellent villain, the more so as there's a sense that he might, had Arthur lived, have been an excellent knight. As things are, with no external discipline to counteract his weaknesses, he has been corrupted by resentment even more than by avarice, and his plan to dominate the land involves defiling it

## Yet More Matter of Britain

Chris Gilmore

first. To this end he has taken up with an evil Druid who is a master of the Black Arts, but he seeks also to obtain and control a magical chalice (clearly McCormack's version of the Grail) whose possession will confer legitimate mastery over all Albion.

All this should make for a satisfying fantasy quest, as the first group sets forth to thwart him; but as the quest has barely got under way by page 300, and as the reminiscences (including some of the very best) continue unabated, there is in truth hardly any story at all. The ineluctable effect is to rush the ending, which would matter more if the story mattered – but it doesn't, really. This book exists entirely to present McCormack's view of Arthur's reign and what came thereafter, within which narrow focus it works brilliantly. Those who like it at all will like it a lot; the rest will lose patience.

Incidentally, both the title and a number of loose ends strongly suggest the first of a series, but no sequel is heralded; should one appear, I will welcome it.

To continue the theme, it seems to me that the Arthurian legend suffers by being altogether too accessible. Edward III based his court etiquette on his conception of it, which was codified by Malory a century later; which was prettified by Tennyson four centuries after that; which was whimsified by T. H. White; which was trivialized by Lerner & Lowe; which was – if anyone knows the word for what the Kennedy family did, I'll happily add it to my vocabulary of invective. The net effect is that anyone can enter at whatever level suits him, as Mike Ashley has demonstrated with four previous anthologies for Raven, and now *The Chronicles of the Round Table* (£5.99).

The formula is as before: there are

some older pieces that have caught Ashley's eye, but most of the material is newly commissioned, with the writers directed to concentrate on new and resurrected tales of the lesser-known knights. Where there are knights there must be ladies, and in this just about everyone follows Malory; his ladies were a tricky bunch, and the prettier they were the less you could trust them. So it is here; even such paragons of virtue as Paul Finch's Madeleine of the Ashes and Michael Coney's Fair Lysette are thoroughly duplicitous. The only lady of any significance who plays off a straight bat is the ill-favoured Alianyr in R. H. Stewart's "The Perfect Stranger."

Considering the variety of authors the stories themselves present, for well over half the book, a surprisingly uniform texture – far more so than *The Chronicles of the Holy Grail*, reviewed in *Interzone* 116. The knights do battle against wrongdoers, sorcery (principally sorts involving illusion), their own baser impulses and each other, according to the chivalrous code and the standard storylines. All use a straightforward first- or third-person narrative, and few writers can avoid grafting the values of the Modern age onto the customs of the Dark.

For my taste Finch's story is a bit sentimental and Lawrence Schimel's lacking in consequence, but these are subjective judgements, and the emotional range is narrow. The darkest story is Liz Holliday's "The Knight of Good Heart," a story of corruption and damnation, while only two attempt humour: Alan Kennington's "Twice Knightly," a simple joke told well, and Theodore Goodridge Roberts's "The Goose Girl," which is more complex but telegraphs its punchline. Though almost all the tales work, the effect rapidly becomes monotonous, less from inherent defect than similarities of approach. When Sir Villiers, in Patrick McCormack's story, reflected that "now I know which story I am in," I took his point – but then, I read the book straight through instead of dipping in over a period of weeks.

The most obvious exceptions are in the last five stories, beginning with Leonora Lang, whose tale of the rescue of Guenevere is quite horrific in its implications (and all the better for being told dead straight) and Brian Stableford, who presents his story from a non-human viewpoint. There follow Darrell Schweitzer's magnifi-



cent tale of Sir Artegal, which lays bare the essentially mystical concept at the heart of chivalry, Parke Goodwin's "Ullanach," which presents an original view of Sir Modred's ancestry and a curious *jeu d'esprit* by John T. Aquino.

Altogether, with 23 stories, most of them substantial and none really bad, a good-value collection; but only the enthusiast will want to read it straight through.

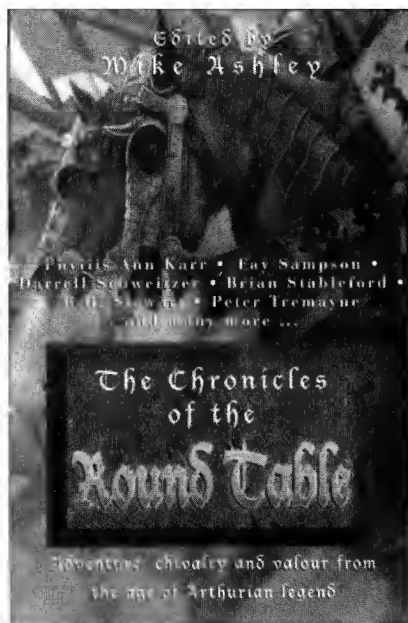
And now, by way of a change, here comes *King's Dragon* by Kate Elliott (Legend, £15.99), bearing on its cover a knight in complete steel, astride a fiery grey charger and brandishing a broadsword. It's not an Arthurian pastiche, however, but the first volume of yet another sword-and-sorcery cycle.

Things of this sort are so abundant that their chance of offering much that is both original and worthwhile is minimal; from which it follows they have to be done supremely well to have any hope of arousing, let alone sustaining, much interest. Elliott has succeeded on both levels, producing a fairy tale from an alternate Age of Faith. She settles to her task with a proper seriousness, providing not only a genealogy of her ruling house and a map, but a calendar and set of astrological signs as well. All of these are arranged so as to overlap, but only partially, those of our own world. Three of her constellations are the Lion, the Scales and the Archer, and they lie in the same relationship to each other in her zodiac as the ones we know; similarly with some of the months, and the Canonical Hours are virtually identical. The map likewise bears a teasing similarity to Europe, but with the Alps shifted north and Denmark much reduced. Likewise the characters: a queen of obvious importance is Berengaria of Varre, but she is married not to Richard of England but to Arnulf of Wendar. Elliott is playing a game of codes and red herrings in the style of Guy Gavriel Kay and I was happy to join in, but those who dislike such games may as well sign off here.

That counts double for those who dislike theology. I've averred before that to be truly convincing an evil priest needs an evil theology, and Elliott provides one of unusual complexity. Her people practise a religion not unlike Christianity, but centred on a Unity of dual male and female aspects rather than a Trinity. It is, moreover, rent by the schisms and heresies typical of the Dark Ages and takes an equivocal attitude to magic, with certain of the (all-female) higher clergy dabbling in the blackest sort of all.

With such a heavily and effectively ornamented background, it's not surprising that the story sometimes gets swamped in the early chapters, the more so as there are two stories. Liath is a young woman of mixed

blood and uncertain magical powers who comes under the control of Frater Hugh, a domineering and manipulative priest who coerces her sexually, only to have her commanded by Wolthere, a senior officer of the King's Eagles (combat couriers). Alain is a bastard, possibly of noble blood, who likewise comes under the influence of a priest, though Frater Agius is a man of true piety and heroic virtue – against which he is also a confirmed heretic and quite probably stark mad beneath his over-controlled persona. Both young people are immediately and deeply involved in the misfortunes of the realm, which is threatened by incursions of the Eika (non-humans roughly equivalent to Vikings) and civil war stemming from the rebellion of the king's sister Sabella, whose claim is based on a curious



and to me somewhat discordant aspect of the religion, which contains elements of a royal fertility cult.

There's plenty here to grip, and Elliott's writing is of an intricate lushness to match the plot. Two months ago I noted that Tom Arden had Vance and Peake firmly in his sights, if not quite in his grasp; Elliott stands in much the same relation to G. G. Kay and Keren Gilfoyle. In so far as she fails, it is in making the many powerful women altogether convincing in terms of the politics and technology of the time; I associate matriarchy with more primitive societies, and equality with those more advanced. Despite their sexually unified god, the reigning noblewomen and princesses of the church all seem more like Ladies of Misrule whose terms have been unaccountably extended than holders by right and custom – but that's my prejudice, and if others perceive it as a restoration of the natural order, I shrug. I'm not letting a little thing like that cloud my enjoyment of this excellent

fairy tale, and I look forward avidly to the next volume.

This field is full of writers who never quite make the first rank, but none cause me more grief than the likes of Louise Cooper, who succeeds so well in the difficult areas only to fail consistently in the easy ones. Her latest, *Sacrament of Night* (Headline, £17.99), is a tale of interaction between two universes governed by dissimilar laws. That idea has been worked by writers as diverse as Lovecraft and Asimov, but her characters are excellent, likewise her eye for interiors; she has a fine sense of the dramatic, and can write passable dialogue, but she has no idea of how to make words pull their full weight in the narrative.

She is fond of long, complex sentences, but has inadequate control over even one as simple as "While Foss had never actively discouraged Calliope's romances, neither had he ever taken steps to encourage them." That second clause could serve as a textbook example for correction (my own shot would be "he had never encouraged them either") and this matters, because the leaden-footed solecisms to be found, if not in every paragraph at least on most pages, must detract heavily from the enjoyment if the reader has any ear whatsoever.

But to the story. The two worlds in question are a parody of *belle époque* France and the monochrome Twilight Dimension, where fire burns cool. Beings from the latter have opened a gate between the two, through which both they and the fauna of their realm can pass, mainly to their sorrow; the environment is inimical, and the quasi-French kill them on sight through natural antipathy, though unaware that they are mind-vampires. They are keen to close the gate, but unfortunately the only key has been lost on the human side. A Twilight Man, Charn, comes through hoping to recover it, but is captured by Arcane Foss, who subjects him to an experimental investigation made more painful because the only anaesthetic available is concussion delivered by truncheon, much to the rage and horror of his tender-hearted daughter, Calliope.

The potential of this situation is obvious, and Cooper's narrative exploits it well enough – or would if one were not constantly dragged aside by the deficiencies of her language which, being ineffably bad in spots and pedestrian at best, undermines both the suspense drama and the *tendresse* burgeoning between Charn and Calliope. I can therefore only recommend this book to cloth- or tin-eared lovers of romance, well aware that though they are numerous, nobody admits to being of their number.

Chris Gilmore.





The programme for the London Actors Theatre Company production of Sophia Kingshill's *The Murder of Edgar Allan Poe* (Finborough Theatre, 1-25 October 1997) reproduces, among other interesting documents, the obituary penned by Rufus W. Griswold for *The New York Tribune*. It reads, in its entirety: "Edgar Allan Poe is dead. He died in Baltimore the day before yesterday. The announcement will startle many, but few will be grieved by it. The poet was well known, personally and by reputation, in all this country; he had readers in England, and in several of the states of Continental Europe, but he had no friends."

Actually, Poe was under the impression he had at least one friend, that being the man he appointed as his literary executor. Given that the man in question was Rufus W. Griswold he might have been mistaken, but I suspect that he knew exactly what he was doing. The biography Griswold wrote of Poe waxed lyrical on the subject of his neurotic debility and his dipsomania, making him (in the words of the *Penguin Companion to Literature*) "an almost Satanic figure." Many Poe scholars have assumed that this was a combination of rank ingratitude – Griswold made his own name after taking over the editorial post that Poe vacated when he left Philadelphia for New York in 1844 – and sheer viciousness, but no such scholar should ever forget Poe's great love of hoaxes. Only "The Balloon Hoax" is nowadays frankly recorded as such, but "The Philosophy of Composition" is a blatant hoax too, and so is "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," and there is an element of wry deception in dozens of other pieces, even (perhaps especially) the visionary masterpiece *Eureka*.

If I had to bet – and who will deny me the right? – I would wager that the obituary Griswold signed had earlier been dictated, word for word, by Poe himself. There is no doubt at all that Griswold's biographical demonization worked far better to preserve Poe's name and work than any exercise in conventional apologetics could ever have done – and there is no doubt that Poe would have known that it would. Poe left us, in his poetry and prose, not much more than enough work to fill a single volume, but if it really was his imp of perversity which pulled Griswold's strings, he also left us a legend to illuminate every page of that volume with an eerie radiance that made every line catch fire.

In the English-speaking world (unlike France) Poe has never been reckoned a writer of the first rank, but that has not inhibited his precious notoriety, nor has it diminished his influence. There is, now more than ever before, a veritable legion of

# The Endurance of Edgar Allan Poe

Brian Stableford

writers occupied in the business of adapting Poe to every other medium, new and old, displaying him as a key character in their own reflections on the barbarism of the past, and casting metaphorical nets in a ceaseless attempt to land, gut and fillet the essence of his artistry and significance. Sophia Kingshill's play attempts all three of these tasks, and succeeds in all three – aided by zesty performances by her actors and clever employment of the confined space of the Finborough Theatre stage by director Joe Cushley.

The plot of the play imagines Poe – who is flat broke and desperate to procure food and medicine for his dying wife – being caught up in a little war between two rival newspapers: James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald*, forerunner of William Randolph Hearst's "yellow press," and Horace Greeley's pious *Tribune*, founded to oppose Bennett's muckraking. Bennett is a character in the play but the *Tribune* is represented by one of its more interesting contributors, the pioneering feminist Margaret Fuller. When an Irishman named Richard Robinson is arrested for the axe-murder of a whore Bennett, determined to help the story run and run, decides that it will play better if Robinson is acquitted and another murderer found; he therefore offers Poe the princely sum of \$50 if Poe can turn his fabled skill in detection to producing that end. Despite Fuller's censure – which he feels keenly, having accepted her charity – Poe endeavours to do what has been asked of him, but his enquiry does not proceed smoothly. Try as he might to follow the precepts of C. Auguste Dupin, the truth he is avid to find insists on twisting itself into hallucinatory knots, within which the identities of all the participants in the drama become inextricably

confused. Circumstances continually conspire to tip him out of the detective story the is trying to act out into one or other (or even several at the same time) of his paranoid fantasies of guilt-made-manifest.

Act One of the play is virtually stolen by a newsgirl who delivers a running commentary on the plot in a hectic mixture of raucous hawking-cries and plaintive songs. Liza Hayden plays the part magnificently, all the more so when she is required to metamorphose into a whore during the first phase of Poe's investigation; her *multum in parvo* cleavage is as expansive as her voice and I have rarely seen anyone display an armpit with such languid provocation. Largely thanks to her good work, the second act can proceed without the aid of such forthright devices. Here Eamonn Clarke, who plays Poe and Robinson, comes into his own with two fine set-pieces (one in each character) and Eve Hopkins (Virginia and "Ligeia") secures the delicate balance of her own spectral ambiguity. As the voice of sanity and cynicism Victoria Willing (Margaret Fuller and a whore) and Chris Tranchell (James Gordon Bennett and, briefly, a lout) have less opportunity to make an individual impact but they provide the sturdy framework which supports the others in their characterizational gymnastics, ably assisted by Erika Poole (Virginia's mother and the brothel-keeper).

Like many ingenious efforts of this general stripe *The Murder of Edgar Allan Poe* is what the *Guardian's* weekly guide calls "Fringe Theatre." The same was true of Ian Mackenzie's remarkable one-man show, which played at the Steiner Theatre two years ago, and of the portmanteau production of *The Masque of the Red Death* with which the London Actors Theatre Company is bracketing the Kingshill play. Poe would almost certainly have approved; although it would be assuming too much to assert that he preferred the margin of American culture to its mainstream he was certainly the kind of man who, once that sentence was passed upon him, did everything in his power to assert and demonstrate that the margin was the better place to be. When fate and fortune cast deep shadows over his life he flatly refused to run for the sunlight; instead he set about proving, as best he could, that any worthwhile artist was bound to love the obscurity of Stygian gloom and to despise the golden light of fame and academic respect. That is a message which cannot become dated – and that is why Edgar Allan Poe continues to speak to us today as intimately, as wisely and (in an admittedly perverse fashion) as reassuringly as he ever did.

Poe did have friends, and he still does: friends who love him well

enough to sustain as best they can the legend of his madness, his intoxication, his notoriety and – above all else – his uncanny powers of perception.

**Note:** By the time this review gets into

print *The Murder of Edgar Allan Poe* will have finished its run, as will *The Masque of the Red Death*. The latter included some exceptionally fine musical performances by numerous artists, including Clare Graydon-James and

Barb Jungr, and a rich variety of performance pieces and playlets by several different companies. I had the privilege of reading a short story, and was delighted to be part of such a wonderful enterprise. **Brian Stableford**



There is a moment in Mike Leigh's last film, *Secrets and Lies*, when Timothy Spall, a tad drunk at a tense and disastrous family party, shouts out that secrets and lies are to blame for the fact that everybody is "in pain." Such an exclamation could only occur after the revelation of uncomfortable truths. His character might equally have said that the hidden facts are what keep the characters in a state of happiness, or at least grudging tolerance. And this is something that a film-maker like Leigh has in common with much of modern horror writing. Horror fiction, arguably, is surveillance on the disclosure of truths that were best left hidden; that were best left as fibs. As with detective fiction, horror depends on the presence of lies: deception is the cement that keeps the edifice (briefly) from crumbling.

Both Christopher Fowler and Peter James understand this fact if their newest novels are anything to go by. Fowler's *Disturbia* (Warner, £7.99) in its customarily snazzy packaging is a novel about English social class – or more specifically, about inter-class tensions. A working-class journalist sets out to interview an upper-class games-player and contemporary dandy. What the journalist does not realize is that acceptance into the arenas of the wealthy is fraught with hazards. The journalist (Vince) finds himself at the whim of the it-boy (Sebastian) who simply wants a new toy to play with. Vince, an expert on London, is made to participate in a quest that will take him all over the city he loves in order to find clues and solve consecutive riddles. Because he has discovered that Seb is an active member of a dangerous, Masons-like society that has been known to dispense with people it does not like, Seb wants him either to put up or shut up. If Vince solves the clues and the puzzle, he earns the right to publish his findings; but the reader suspects that this is an empty gesture, dangled before him to make him start playing. If he fails at any point during the long night of the soul that he spends grumming for the truth about London, his loved ones might die. Or he himself might die. With a Kafkaesque sense of dislocation and loneliness, Vince races around the Big Smoke.

*Disturbia* was one of the most entertaining and chilling works of fiction that this reviewer has read in the last five years. The book is magnificent. Simple in its plotting,

undoubtedly, but magnificent. If Vince's struggle around the nation's capital draws comparisons with Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* (1985), perhaps *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, and even an old episode of LWT's *The Professionals*, there are also plenty of original events to recommend it. Novels about class must chronicle the ephemera and social mores of both the working and the upper classes. The trick is getting the balance right: or the depth of feeling right. The trick is in not overstating either case. Any book that represents London as a Clichéville of whelk-eaters in donkey jackets or Dom Perignon-swilling rich brats, would need to work on other levels, or in other ways. I am delighted to report that *Disturbia* works with wonderful subtlety. At times, it seems so up-to-date that it reads like reportage, or like the "non-fiction novels" of someone like Truman Capote – *In Cold Blood*, for example. The best attribute of a London novel, paradoxically, is that it teaches the reader nothing new about London; instead, it reinforces impressions that the reader would have had already.

All writing involves a process of filtration. Novels that attempt to say something about modern life must include plenty of that modern life. Fowler's novel is a London novel, possibly one of the most convincing London novels ever. It expands upon notions of class that have not been well explored since Ayckbourn, or more

## Cement

David Mathew

recently, in their most famous song on the subject, the pop group Pulp.

Vince solves problems like Sherlock Holmes, but (to the novel's temporary downfall) some of the coincidences inherent are strictly Dickensian, or Fieldingesque. I ummed and aahed a few times during Vince's quest, particularly when a street kid solves a clue which involves historical references to the London Telephone Exchange. Benefit of the doubt is one thing, but the author was taking his chances this time.

The clues become more obscure; and changes occur. We see, for one thing, the whittling down of Vince's values in his blasé attitude, as follows: "You can help me find it if you like, but don't blame me if someone tries to kill you." *Disturbia*, with its clever title, is written in short, character-hopping sections: as the novel progresses, it is less about the differences between classes, and more about those classes taking on bestial characteristics: the hunted and the prey. And *Disturbia* is that rarest of beasts: a book with a genuine surprise ending, which has Vince succumbing to forces over which he had hitherto believed himself to be in control. But his old cement has crumbled; Vincent has been rebuilt.

In the themes of money and poverty, Peter James's *The Truth* (Orion, £16.99) has connections with the Fowler. Otherwise, the James has a more supernatural bent. A childless couple faces the prospect of bankruptcy when a mysterious stranger called Sarotzini makes them his indecent proposal. He will pay off their considerable debts and more if Susan (the wife) will be the surrogate mother of his child. Here you get to see the emotions of those on the side of money-and-evil, as well as those of the victims in the drama. And this being a modern novel, you can well believe that there is more than meets the eye. Sure enough, as soon as Susan is pregnant, certain activities of what might be labelled "good luck" occur. For example, the composer who had been suing John (the husband) for plagiarism suddenly dies. As do other people even vaguely opposed to the pregnancy. As the gestation period continues, it becomes obvious that more than a child is growing: there is something in the atmosphere, charging it up.

The couple fall out. Susan even suspects her husband of engineering the pregnancy, including the notion

of ritual child-sacrifice which, by this point, is what most participants in the plot have come to suspect is to be the fate of the unborn child. But John does not give up on her, even when she runs away to her native America. Her guardian, Kundz, is in love/lust with her, and lets her go, to Sarotzini's displeasure. But there is plenty of activity still to pass before the end of the novel. As Sarotzini himself put is: "It is the Nineteenth Truth that tells us that only in the vortex of our deepest fear can we see with true clarity." Indeed. Gripping stuff.

On BBC 2's *Horror Café* – a Halloween documentary some years ago, in which a dinner-table's worth of writers and horror film-makers expounded their notions about contemporary dark fantasy – Peter Atkins, a last-minute substitute for George Romero, proved himself to be the most intelligent presence. One of the cabal's tasks was to create a movie, from scratch, in a round-robin style. And although the programme proved that creativity is a solo (or at least, *private* affair), with the team dragging the deadweight plot in different directions, Atkins's contributions were adroit, especially the material about Judas. These efforts proved beyond any doubt that Peter Atkins is a writer who is comfortable thinking on his feet. The *Hellraiser* movies (for which he now has the dubious honour of being the script-writer) have succumbed to the law of diminishing returns. The first *Hellraiser*, scripted by Clive Barker, was an improvable gem, which the second movie (evidencing Atkins's first stab at scriptwriting) served adequately, but no more. The third was a travesty: a genuinely ugly and cynical piece of film-making. To this day, I have been unable to force myself to rent the fourth – nor am I likely to in the near future. Enough's enough.

I'm pleased to report that *Big Thunder* (HarperCollins, £16.99) is better than any of Peter Atkins's film work. At first, it seems as though there will be similarities, not least in the descriptions of evil forces: "... and these three bastards *walked*. And never lost ground. No matter how fast he ran, he couldn't shake them." It would be difficult to imagine *Hellraiser's* Pinhead running: he would lose his appeal. Lose his cool.

Following a near-fatal car crash, an old man lies comatose in a hospital bed while in a metaphysical dream-world, astral diaspora see the possibility of using his imagination as a conduit for getting to earth. The crash-victim, Read, was the author in the 1930s of a pulp, urbane, sophisticated and suavely sadistic hero called the Blue Valentine. Now, in the '90s, this Valentine returns, righting wrongs in the most violent

and self-righteous of fashions: and for his own reasons, which in the end are not altruistic. "Myths – or things we've turned into myths – trying to break into this world, using our own representations of them as their points of access."

This novel has plenty to recommend it, not least of all the Valentine himself. To start with he is the sort of vigilante that most people (however secretly) would like to right their wrongs for them. He does not stop at a macho punch on the nose. He gives the baddies what-for, and victims of wrong-doing often confess that they would like to repay their attackers in this way. Also, I liked the idea of the morning after a supernatural apparition being the time for not only the human participant but the ethereal one also to reflect on the night before. Ghosts are leaking in. It is not so much that edifices are being knocked down as that the brickwork is developing holes, and that thugs from another time are squeezing through.

Atkins's strength is in delineations of weirdness and dislocation. Another nice touch is when the heroine, Avis, discovers that her friend Fern has been dreaming about her own (Avis's) grandfather, among other things. After the death of friends, Avis tracks down the Valentine's creator in a hospital, because it has become clear that the vigilante is no longer a force for Good. A Pre-Millennial struggle ensues.

This is a fast read and some of the writing is poetic and heady, leaving the reader with a pleasantly tipsy sensation when he glances up. But this richness clashes, as can only be expected, with some of the authentic street babble from the New York scenes. Atkins has gone out of his way to recreate genuine Big Apple-speak, and there is occasionally more profanity than there is in Gangsta Rap as Atkins attempts to emulate the rhythms of New York speech. This does not always work: "But, Jesus, the world better be *damn* grateful once she saved its fucking ass." Hmm.

No such complaints can be made of Tom Holland's *Deliver Us From Evil* (Little, Brown, £14.99), a grim Marlovian parable. It transports the reader to the 17th century – a time of beliefs in sorcery and witchcraft; and a time of mortal primitivism, as evidenced, for example, in the swift and ready willingness to burn people at the stake, or to decapitate and leave heads on spikes. The novel is concerned with the appearance of old and evil forces, which coincides with an historical time of problems with the Commonwealth, the facts of which are presented. A character who at first is named Faustus – "a compound of impossible things" – delivers unto England a blood-sucking army of the dead, Faustus having a hatred for

anybody with "the canker of morality in his soul." Demons take over the shells of humans. But is Faustus as evil as Evil gets? And what *is* Evil, anyway? These are some of the questions posed – particularly after Robert Foxe (as he is known at the beginning) becomes infected by the bad magic. What has he become? What is it that cannot be smelled by a vampire? Robert wears the Devil's mark. And on the question of Evil, the novel presents a shifting perception: who are the more evil, those who kill for revenge, who presumably should know better, or those who kill in the first place?

Although the book takes a while to get into (unless you happen to read historical fiction), there are some excellent early twists. Immortality is clearly not all it's cracked up to be, or even as immutable as its demonic practitioners would have the unconverted believe. *Deliver Us From Evil* is a phantasmagoria, and in its meticulous standards of historical research, a real treat. Chances are I missed some historical references, but I am fairly sure I caught most of the literary ones, and was particularly amused to find Robert ending up at one point as a badly treated lackey for the blind John Milton. Like Vince in *Disturbia*, we have a young main character on a personal quest, fighting forces beyond his control. The phrase "absolute power corrupts absolutely" sprang to mind several times as I was reading. Although it was not to my personal taste as much as the Fowler, it nevertheless has great appeal. Tom Holland writes beautifully and powerfully – but densely. This is not a travel-to-work read; it demands full audience participation and attendance.

Finally, there is just room to mention *Dark Terrors 3* (Gollancz, £16.99), edited by Stephen Jones and David Sutton. It was particularly refreshing to note the number of names who make fewer appearances in such anthologies than some of the more horny veterans. Ray Garton, the flash-trash author of the erotic chiller, *Crucifax*, offers up "Pieces," a startling short story and an original metaphor for the power of memory. It might have ended up twee – the idea of a man who was abused as a child recalling the indignities which befell him, and then, as a result, falling to pieces, *literally* – but Garton's story has plenty of brooding strength. Kathryn Ptacek's "Skinned Angels" is a good story which might make you think about what coral really is. And Conrad Williams's "The Windmill" is a Hammer House of Horror-style tale of a sexual relationship that has deteriorated beyond repair. This might also have fitted nicely in any of the Michele Slung *petit-morts* anthologies.

David Mathew



There are some writers you can forgive almost anything, and Martin Amis is one of them. But the key word there is "almost."

A flurry of promotional activity – most notably an entertaining double-act with Gore Vidal on BBC Radio 4's *Start the Week*, and the well-publicized announcement of his intention to leave England to take up residence in the US (which, he says, is the only country "road-testing the future" ... a nice line) – could have persuaded many that his new novella *Night Train* (Cape, £9.99) is something a little bit special. The truth of the matter, however, is that, while it does have its moments, it's not.

Touted as a surprise addition to the *noir* literary canon – a phrase much-loved by many but mis-used by most – *Night Train* is a first-person narrative on the part of a hard-bitten former alcoholic called Mike Hoolihan who happens to be a police-woman. In fact she's a "police," she tells us in the first paragraph, explaining away such unusual and awkward nomenclature with:

"... it's a parlance we have. Among ourselves, we would never say I am a policewoman or I am a police officer. We would just say I am a police. I am a police."

This is clearly something that Ed McBain and the writers on *NYPD Blue* or *Law and Order* (among many commonly regarded to be at the cutting edge of US police-procedural fiction) know nothing about, or maybe McBain has simply not bothered putting it into the mouths of Steve Carella and the rest of the guys at the 87th because it sounds so ridiculous. Who knows. Maybe now it'll catch on. Though when one considers the inevitable usage-extrapolation of such depersonalization (even *dehumanization*) – "I am a write; I am a sport(s); I am a bank; I am a farm..." – perhaps not.

Going back to the final couple of sentences in that brief extract, that's something Amis does a lot in this book. A lot. In this book. He repeats himself, either straight or by the substitution of alternative words and/or phrases for information he has already imparted.

For example: *As of today – April second – I consider the case "Solved." It's closed. It's made. It's down.*

In fact, his narrator and his characters repeat themselves so frequently that it comes across as being jarringly unrealistic.

Likewise the "bad boy" Elmore Leonard-style "voice of the streets," which Amis employs particularly clumsily – as demonstrated by this exchange between Hoolihan and one of her colleagues:

"Colonel Tom's daughter killed herself tonight."

"Jennifer?" And it just came out. I said: "You're fucking me."

## Noir? Nah!

Peter Crowther

"I wish I was fucking you, Mike. Really. This is as bad as it gets."

Interestingly, as the book nears and then crashes through the half-way mark, the narrative style improves ... though one suspects that many literary travellers will have left the bus a few stops back. And that's a shame because it is worth hanging on in there.

The story revolves around Hoolihan's investigations into the circumstances surrounding the death of scientist Jennifer Rockwell – and one could be forgiven for thinking that was a surname chosen to convey the destruction of the last vestiges of cosy picket-fence Americana – in what appears to be a suicide ... though, with three shots through the mouth, one has to admire the lady's determination.

But, as the syntax and the sentences creak under Amis's almost

criminal obliteration of form, the author does manage to wheel on an engagingly weird and whacked-out stream of cameo players until the ending is revealed.

Intrinsically, *Night Train* contains some good moments, a few great moments and, threaded throughout, that strange, off-kilter worldview that Amis has made his very own. No complaints there.

But if it's Amis at his best that you want, try – or simply re-read – one of his earlier books.

And if it's *noir* you're after, better stick with Goodis and Thompson.

Then there are some writers you can forgive *absolutely* anything, and Kurt Vonnegut is one that fits that particular literary cloth as though it were cut to fit ... at least as far as *I'm* concerned. Even when his new novel, *Timequake* (Cape, £15.99), is not a novel at all. But then, we've come to expect and even cherish such iconoclastic behaviour from Vonnegut.

The premise of this slim book is both slight and profound. Essentially, it centres on a glitch in time – the old, much-loved "chronosyncastic infundibulum," perhaps, from *The Sirens of Titan*? – which more-or-less stops the clocks on 13 February 2001, rewinds the world back ten years and has everyone re-live their lives ... with the full knowledge that they are doing so but without any ability to do things different or to talk about it with others in the same temporally-turned-about boat. So all the mistakes as well as all the good times are to be endured once more. It's a frightening thought.

Into this scenario, Vonnegut finally places himself as the narrator ... something he's done only once before, and even then it seemed to be an experiment. That first occasion is when, sitting in a cocktail lounge in *Breakfast of Champions* some half-way through the book, wearing dark glasses, he suddenly intrudes into the third-person narrative featuring the off-the-wall sf writer Kilgore Trout, Vonnegut's fictional *alter ego*, as a god-like figure which is operating Trout's – and, indeed, *all* of the characters' – strings from afar. And when the waitress asks how he can see anything, sitting wearing dark glasses in an already dimly lit bar, Vonnegut replies, "The big show is inside my head."

One suspects that the same holds true for *Timequake*. But for the reader prepared to give a little more of him- or herself, there's a rare treat in store.

Jerking to and fro in typical Vonnegut fashion, the story – or rather the steady process of events (which, I suppose, *is* a story) – winds up (several times) at a beachfront clambake in Xanadu where Vonnegut meets





Trout and is treated to a short dissertation on a new quality at large in the universe. That quality, Trout explains, is soul.

What precedes and follows that brief conversation includes, among so many wonderful vignettes and observations: a very old joke engagingly retold; a re-appraisal of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*; the callousness of the second bomb dropped on Japan at the close of the Second World War; and, threaded throughout, autobiographical details which include Vonnegut's mother's suicide, and occasional updates on his brother's fight against cancer.

In Wilder's *Our Town*, the character Emily – in her farewell speech – asks, “Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? Every, every minute?”

Well, with the help of people like Vonnegut, perhaps they would be more able to do just that.

In his story “An American Family Marooned on the Planet Pluto,” the great Kilgore Trout wrote: “Nothing wrecks any kind of love more effectively than the discovery that your previously acceptable behaviour has become ridiculous.”

That's not likely where Vonnegut is concerned.

This fine, fine piece of work has been publicized as the author's last book. On the obscure off-chance that he will ever see or hear of this review, one can only ask that he reconsider.

Ray Bradbury's latest collection, *Driving Blind* (Avon, \$23), is not dissimilar to Vonnegut's novel in that it, too, is primarily a set of observations and experiences only some of which are gathered around a central plot. And even then, these plots are slight ... sometimes, they're slight in the extreme.

Let's get something straight here: there are some who say that, on the strength of his past few outings – the two thinly disguised autobiographical novels *Death is a Lonely Business* and *A Graveyard for Lunatics*; the patched up “novel” *Green Shadows, White Whale*; and last year's collection *Quicker Than the Eye* – Bradbury has lost it. But lost *what*?

If anything, he has become more focused.

True, he rarely bothers with those engagingly small-town Martian landscapes to act as vehicles for his “message”: these days, he tells it straight. No embellishments.

The most notable example of this is “That Old Dog Lying in the Dust,” a 16-page remembrance of a lost-and-gone one-ring Mexican circus encountered by the story's narrator (and, as he explains in his afterword, by Bradbury himself) in the late summer of 1945. The story, such as it is, goes through every single moment of

an evening's performance ... the acts, the spectators, the sellers of cold watermelon slices and tacos, the sounds and the smells – and, as a reader, you can see and hear and feel and smell and taste them all. Nothing happens in this story – and I mean *nothing* – but it's as wonderful a piece of writing as any that Bradbury has done before. And it's the clinching last couple of lines that provides the real power:

*And still nights, twenty-nine years later, I hear that one-ring circus playing its two bands, one real, one hiccuping on records, a long way off on a warm Santa Ana wind, and I wake and sit up in bed, alone, and it is not there.*

This is what Bradbury has always done and has always written about: the passing of things and the metamorphosis of the world into something ... different. Whether that new something is better or worse is not the point. The point is the *difference*.

Bradbury's story collections are now unashamedly nostalgic; they are sets of sepia-tinged vignettes that compare with Woody Allen's *Radio Days* or Neil Simon's quartet of autobiographical plays ... literary photo-albums discovered in an old attic and displaying in their dusty pages a world and a set of values that are, in many cases, as alien to us in 1997 as the *real* Martian landscape.

A well-wisher interrupts a find-the-card con game on a night train out of Chicago only to find that *nobody* wanted his help;

A confused dead man returns from the graveyard because, after only four years, his wife has stopped mourning;

A bunch of kids telling spooky stories discover the magic of approaching adulthood in the darkness;

A long-ago lover-correspondent breaks into the house of two old women to regain his letters and restart his courting process;

A man accidentally meets up with his butcher in a foreign city and discovers first that they have nothing at all in common ... and then that they are almost identical;

A new garbage-disposal unit provides an unexpected means of getting rid of unwanted company;

A man who has worn an eyeless black mask all of his life decides to try to take up his place in society;

A man discovers surprisingly familiar faces in a collection of college yearbooks in an old bookstore;

A couple revisit a special occasion they once watched in hiding as kids long ago ... and catch a fleeting glimpse of someone watching *them*;

Two people in need of money and sustenance agree to eat nightly on display in a Paris restaurant for free ... but nothing lasts forever;

And one of a pair of twin spinsters decides there's only one way out of

their mirror-like existence.

There are many more.

Bradbury is the W. Somerset Maugham of our time, entirely at home in any age and in any genre and in any setting. *Driving Blind* is a group of stories that will not scare or chill but will, quite simply, astound, amaze and warm the cockles of even the most frost-bitten cynical heart – as essential a purchase as any one of the equally wonderful collections that bear his name.

Just space – and *only* just – to mention two more excellent books, one expected and one which proved to be a delicious surprise.

First, the expected:

The fourth volume of Stephen King's long-running saga of Roland the gunslinger continues, with the Dark Tower drawing enticingly closer ... but paradoxically maintaining its distance. As expected, *Wizard and Glass* (Hodder & Stoughton, £14.99) equals the high points of the previous instalments – what *wasn't* expected was that it should so comfortably exceed them.

You're not going to buy this book and start reading it if you haven't read the others; and if you *have* read them, then all you need to know is that the new one is available. So now you know.

And for those who have stayed away from Roland's adventures and simply need an incentive to jump aboard, NEL has just re-released the first three volumes (*The Gunslinger*, *The Drawing of the Three* and *The Waste Lands*) in handsome new uniform additions. So now you can find out what all the fuss is about.

And finally...

Harvey Jacobs's *American Goliath* (St Martin's Press, \$23.95) is a pure celebration of Americana, a feast of earthy, rich language and extremely bawdy goings-on concerning the discovery and subsequent side-show display of a fossilized giant in the late 19th century. This privately owned new attraction proves to be an immediate crowd-puller ... so much so that the esteemed P. T. Barnum himself wants to get a piece of the action ... but getting it is not going to be as easy as he expects.

*“He refused fifty thousand?”*

*“Not refused, Mr Barnum. He said he needed time to consult ‘unnamed associates’.”*

*“Farmers don't have unnamed associates. They have haystacks and horse manure.”*

An affectionate, madcap, irreverent romp of semi-magical realism that, while based on a true story, is as fantastic and as gut-wrenchingly funny as anything you'll read this year ... and *my*, but it's been a good year!

Pete Crowther

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Aiken, Joan. **The Cockatrice Boys**. Illustrated by Jason Van Hollander. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86390-X, 221pp, trade paperback, \$12.95. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1996; she has been writing for decades, and has produced well-regarded fantasy, horror and other works of interest both for children and for adults, but this is probably the first Joan Aiken book Interzone has ever been sent for review – and of course it took an American publisher to do it; like Peter Dickinson, whose books we also do not receive, she is one of those writers much more honoured in American fantasy-genre circles than in those of this, her home country; no British publisher would dream of sending us Aiken or Dickinson titles – they're for children [or, in the case of the two writers' adult novels, they're "general fiction"].) 13th November 1997.

Anderson, Poul. **Harvest the Fire**. Illustrated by Vincent Di Fate. Tor, ISBN 0-812-55375-6, 190pp, A-format paperback, cover by Di Fate, \$5.99. (Sf novella, first published in the USA, 1995; a follow-up to *Harvest of Stars* [1993] and *The Stars Are Also Fire* [1994], but very much slimmer than those two chunky books.) November 1997.

Ashley, Mike, ed. **The Chronicles of the Round Table**. Raven, ISBN 1-85487-953-7, x+451pp, B-format paperback, cover by Julek Heller, £5.99. (Arthurian fantasy anthology, first edition; the fifth volume of a series – its predecessors were *The Pendragon Chronicles* [1990], *The Camelot Chronicles*, [1992], *The Merlin Chronicles* [1995] and *The Chronicles of the Holy Grail* [1996] – in which Ashley brings together a wide range of fiction on the ever-fascinating Matter of Britain; it contains original stories by Cherith Baldry, Michael Coney, Seamus Cullen,

Peter T. Garratt, Liz Holliday, Phyllis Ann Karr, Fay Sampson, Darrell Schweitzer, Brian Stableford, Keith Taylor, Peter Valentine Timlett, Peter Tremayne and others; among the reprinted stories are pieces by Parke Godwin and Theodore Goodridge Roberts; recommended.) 30th October 1997.

Ashman, Malcolm. **Fabulous Beasts**. Text by Joyce Hargreaves. Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-410-5, 112pp, very large-format paperback, £13.99. (Fantasy art collection; first edition; Ashman is a British illustrator who has worked on fairy tales, editions of Lewis Carroll's "Alice" books, etc; the text describes the various fantastic creatures he evokes.) 16th October 1997.

Baird, Wilhelmina. **Chaos Come Again**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00479-2, 330pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bruce Jensen, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; the author's fourth novel, following *Crashcourse*, *Clipjoint* and *Psykosis*; "Wilhelmina Baird" is a pseudonym for French-resident British author Joyce Hutchinson; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 116.) October 1997.

Bloch, Robert. **Robert Bloch: Appreciations of the Master**. Edited by Richard Matheson and Ricia Mainhardt. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86385-3, 382pp, trade paperback, \$18.95. (Horror collection-cum-festschrift; first published in the USA, 1995 [we never saw the hardcover, and did not know it existed until now]; it contains 18 stories, an essay and a poem – a substantial collection, almost as big as *The Best of Robert Bloch* [Del Rey, 1977], with which it contains a few obvious overlaps such as "Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper" [1943] and "That Hell-Bound Train" [1958] – interspersed with copious anecdotes and reminiscences by the late author's friends; contributors include William Peter Blatty, Ray Bradbury, Ramsey Campbell, Arthur C. Clarke, Harlan Ellison, Philip José Farmer, Neil Gaiman, Stephen King, William F. Nolan, Andre Norton, Fredrik Pohl, Peter Straub, William Tenn, Gahan Wilson and many others; as usual with these things, the few British contributors are less effusive than their American counterparts – we

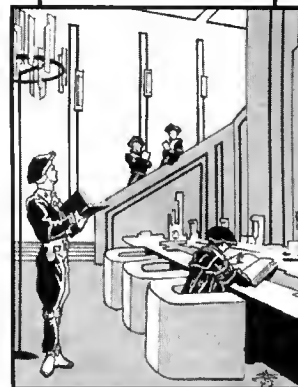
Brits tend to be embarrassed by this sort of tribute, don't you know, while the Americans let it all hang out [Bradbury virtually breaks down and blubbers in his contribution]; evidently, Bob Bloch was much loved [as was fan-author Bob Shaw on this side of the water], and this volume makes a fine testimonial.) 28th October 1997.

Bradbury, Ray. **Driving Blind**. Avon, ISBN 0-380-97381-2, 261pp, hardcover, \$23. (Horror/fantasy/mainstream collection, first edition; when *Quicker Than the Eye* was published by Avon in November 1996 we wrote: "a new Bradbury collection is a rare but predictable event [it has been eight years since his last, *The Toybee Convector*]; well, here is another volume after only ten months – the first time he has published new books so rapidly since his heyday of the early 1950s; clearly Bradbury is experiencing a renewed creative surge in his old age; there are 21 stories here, none of them collected before, most of them apparently written in the past year or two, and [at least according to the acknowledgments page] only four of them previously published in magazines or original anthologies; extraordinary!) *Lote entry: 10th September publication, received in October 1997.*

Bradman, Tony, ed. **Sensational Cyber Stories**. Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-408-366, 190pp, hardcover, cover by George Smith, £9.99. (Juvenile sf anthology, first edition; it contains all-original stories by writers with a reputation in the children's-fiction field, including Malorie Blackman, Steve Bowkett, Helen Dunmore, Laurence Staig and Paul Stewart.) 1st November 1997.

Budrys, Algis. **Entertainment**. Edited by Rick Katze and Anthony R. Lewis. NE5FA Press [PO Box 809, Framingham, MA 01701-0809, USA], ISBN 1-886778-05-1, vii+241pp, trade paperback, cover by Don Maitz, \$12. (Sf collection, first edition; eight good stories, all from the 1950s, plus a detailed bibliography by Anthony R. Lewis; oddly, the book comprises the entire contents of Budrys's first collection, *The Unexpected Dimension* [1960], plus about half the contents of his second collection, Budrys'

## BOOKS RECEIVED



OCTOBER 1997

*Inferno* [1963; published in Britain as *The Furious Future*], but nothing at all from his third collection, *Blood and Buming* [1978], and no previously uncollected stories [even though many exist, as Lewis's bibliography informs us]: a strange imbalance, which editor Rick Katze does not attempt to explain in his too-brief introduction.) *Lote entry: September publication, received in October 1997.*

Caldecott, Moyra. **Aquae Sulis**. Bladud Books [Mushroom Publishing, 156 Southlands, Weston Village, Bath BA1 4EB], ISBN 1-899142-20-7, 288pp, B-format paperback, cover by Helen Folkes, £6.99. (Historical fantasy novel, first edition; it's set in Bath, known to the Romans as Aquae Sulis, in the first century A.D.) *No date shown: received in October 1997.*

Chapman, Stepan. **The Troika**. The Ministry of Whimsy Press [PO Box 4248, Tallahassee, FL 32315, USA], ISBN 1-890464-02-3, 251pp, trade paperback, cover by Alan M. Clark, \$14.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition; a debut novel by an American writer [born 1951] who has been publishing short stories since the 1970s [initially in Damon Knight's *Orbit* anthology series]; this novel comes with a certain amount of advance buzz: "it has style, it has wit, it has guts," says Brian Stableford, and it's an "ambitious yet playful work, with a clear pleasure in language," says Kathe Kojia.) 25th October 1997.

Chester, Deborah. **Realm of Light**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00480-6, 395pp, A-format

paperback, cover by Mary Jo Phalen, \$6.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; sequel to *Reign of Shodows and Shodow Wor.*) October 1997.

Clarke, Arthur C. **3001: The Final Odyssey.** Voyager, ISBN 0-586-06624-1, viii+273pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA [?], 1997; the concluding novel in the "2001" saga, and a classic piece of latter-day Clarke; HarperCollins never sent us a hardback review copy of this [shucks, they didn't send us the latest novel by the best-known living sf writer in the world!], but it was reviewed by Chris Gilmore from the American [Del Rey] edition in *Interzone* 119.) 3rd November 1997.

De Lint, Charles. **Mulengro: A Romany Tale.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-32113-7, 488pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fletcher Sibthorp, £6.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1985; the author's four-page afterword is dated 1995; what relationship [if any] the novel bears to George Borrow's gypsy books *Lovengro* [1851] and *The Romany Rye* [1857] is unclear.) 7th November 1997.

De Lint, Charles. **Someplace to be Flying.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85849-3, 380pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) February 1998.

De Lint, Charles. **Trader.** Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-67212-7, 448pp, hardcover, cover by Fletcher Sibthorp, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997.) 7th November 1997.

Denton, Bradley. **One Day Closer to Death: Eight Stabs at Immortality.** St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-18150-7, xi+337pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Fantasy collection, first edition; proof copy received; it subsumes the earlier small-press collections *The Colvin Coolidge Home for Dead Comedians* and *A Conflogration Artist* [both Wildside Press, 1993], which were given a World Fantasy Award; there are eight stories, plus author's intro and notes [and a cod obituary]; the fiction includes a previously-unpublished story about Denton's anti-hero Jimmy Blackburn, "Blackburn Bakes Cookies.") February 1998.

Disch, Tom. **A Child's Garden of Grammar.** Cartoons by Dave Morice. University Press of New England, ISBN 0-87451-850-4, vi+88pp, trade paperback, \$9.95. (Poetry collection-cum-grammar primer, first edition; most of the verses first appeared in *Asimov's SF Magazine*; a charming little book, done with Disch's customary wit and enhanced by Morice's lively drawings.) *Lote entry: 19th September publication, received in October 1997.*

Dozois, Gardner, ed. **The Best New Science Fiction: Tenth Annual Collection.** Raven, ISBN 1-85487-971-5, lviii+676pp, B-format paperback, cover by Phil Marritt, £7.99. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA as *The Year's Best Science Fiction: Fourteenth Annual Collection*, 1997; it contains stories by William Barton, Gregory Benford, James P. Blaylock, Damien Broderick, Tony Daniel [twice], Gregory Feeley, Gwyneth Jones, John Kessel, Nancy Kress, Jonathan Lethem, Maureen F. McHugh, Paul Park, Robert Reed, Mike Resnick, Charles Sheffield, Robert Silverberg, Bruce Sterling, Michael Swanwick, Cherry Wilder, Walter Jon Williams, Gene Wolfe and others; two of the stories are from *Interzone* – Stephen Baxter's "In the MSOB" and Ian McDonald's "Recording Angel"; reviewed by Neil Jones & Neil McIntosh in *Interzone* 125.) 30th October 1997.

Flieger, Verlyn. **A Question of Time: J. R. R. Tolkien's Road to Faërie.** Kent State University Press, ISBN 0-87338-574-8, x+276pp, hardcover, \$35. (Critical study of Tolkien's fantasy, from a "time-travel" perspective; first edition; a serious work, by an author who has written an earlier book on Tolkien, *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World*; this is a very handsomely-produced book, of the kind that one only sees from American presses; contrary to the clichéd view of the USA as quintessentially the land of McDonald's burger-bars, such luxurious and expensive book-making, together with their ridiculously low-priced gasoline, their linguistic conservatism [preserving such good old English words as "sidewalk"

and "gotten"], their old-fashioned units of measurement and their curiously antique-looking narrow-pin electricity sockets, suggests that the United States exists, like something from a Philip K. Dick novel, in a strange time-warp, apparently immune to the relentless modernizing-and-inflating effect which sweeps the rest of the world.) 1st November 1997.

Flynn, Michael. **Rogue Star.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86136-2, 444pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; sequel to *Firestar* [1996]; like its predecessor, it's near-future hard sf, done on the massive scale of a fantasy tome; that sounds commendably ambitious, but the trouble with this multi-peopled, multi-stranded sort of thing is that it tends to fall into the clichés of Harold Robbins/Arthur Hailey-style "social melodrama" [vide many of Ben Bova's novels] – what one might label "*The Corpetboggies in space*"; still, it may be that Flynn does it better than Bova.) April 1998.

Frank, Steven J. **The Uncertainty Principle.** "1996 Pocket Rocket Prize Winner." Permeable Press [47 Noe St., #4, San Francisco, CA 94114-1017, USA], ISBN 1-882633-26-1, 238pp, trade paperback, no price shown. (Sf [?] novel, first edition; we're not certain if it's sf, but it's definitely a romance about scientists, written by a scientist-turned-lawyer; probably a debut novel.) No date shown: received in October 1997.

Gardner, Craig Shaw. **Dragon Burning: The Dragon Circle [Book Three].** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00478-4, 309pp, A-format paperback, cover by Glenn Kim, \$5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996.) 1st October 1997.

Haining, Peter, ed. **The Wizards of Odd: Comic Tales of Fantasy.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00487-3, xiv+347pp, A-format paperback, cover by Walter Velez, \$6.50. (Fantasy anthology, first published in the UK, 1996; this interesting selection of reprints mixes well-known stories with the obscure [and includes some sf]; authors include Douglas Adams, Brian Aldiss, F. Anstey, Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Fredric Brown, James Branch Cabell, Arthur

C. Clarke, John Collier, Avram Davidson, Philip K. Dick, Lord Dunsany, Henry Kuttner, Ursula Le Guin, Fritz Leiber, C. S. Lewis, Larry Niven, Terry Pratchett, Eric Frank Russell, Kurt Vonnegut and H. G. Wells [the last-named is represented by a little-known piece called "The Wild Asses of the Devil"].) November 1997.

Haldeman, Joe. **Forever Peace.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00406-7, 326pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first edition; his long-awaited follow-up to the Hugo-winning *The Forever War* [1975].) 1st October 1997.

Hall, John. **Homecoming Queen.** Point Horror, ISBN 0-590-19639-1, 209pp, A-format paperback, £3.50. (Juvenile horror novel, first published in the USA, 1996; the reverse of the title pages states: "Copyright John Scognamiglio, 1996.") October 1997.

Halperin, James L. **The First Immortal.** "A novel of the future." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-42092-6, vii+341pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a second book by the author of *The Truth Machine* [and apparently in the same mainstream-oriented didactic vein], it concerns cryonics and the prospects for physical longevity.) January 1998.

Hand, Elizabeth. **Glimmering.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648027-6, xiv+413pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1997; reviewed, from the American edition, by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 126.) 3rd November 1997.

Heinlein, Robert A. **Starship Troopers.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-78358-9, 208pp, A-format paperback, cover by James Warhola [the late Andy Warhol's brother!], \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1959; a Hugo Award-winner, and the book which kicked off the whole sub-genre of "military sf"; this is the 27th Ace printing since 1987 [before that it was a Berkley paperback for many years]; evidently Heinlein continues to sell very well in the States, though his oeuvre no longer seems to be quite so "live" here in Britain.) November 1997.



Hughes, Brian. **Hobson & Co (Paranormal Investigators)**. Ripping Publishing [PO Box 286, Epsom, Surrey KT19 9YG], ISBN 1-899884-11-4, 356pp, A-format paperback, cover by the author, £5.99.

(Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; it seems to be a debut book by a new British writer.) *Lote entry: 10th September publication, received in October 1997.*

Jones, Stephen, ed. **The Best New Horror: Volume Eight**. Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-901-4, xi+513pp, B-format paperback, £6.99.

(Horror anthology, first edition; the cover gives the title as *The Mommoth Book of Best New Horror*; it contains reprint stories [all from the year 1996] by Poppy Z. Brite, Douglas Clegg, Storm Constantine, Christopher Fowler, Gregory Frost, Terry Lamsley, Thomas Ligotti, Richard Christian Matheson, Norman Partridge, Nicholas Royle, Iain Sinclair, Michael Marshall Smith, Thomas Tessier and others; one story, "The Curse of Kali" by Cherry Wilder, is from *Interzone*.) *30th October 1997.*

Jones, Stephen, ed. **The Best New Horror: Volume Eight**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-7867-0474-8, xi+513pp, B-format paperback, \$10.95. (Horror anthology, first published in the UK, 1997; as with the UK edition, the cover gives the title as *The Mommoth Book of Best New Horror*.) *November 1997.*

Jones, Stephen, and David Sutton, eds. **Dark Terrors 2: The Gollancz Book of Horror**. Vista, ISBN 0-575-60253-X, 379pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton, £5.99. (Horror anthology, first published in 1996; reviewed by Peter Crowther in *Interzone* 116.) *31st October 1997.*

Jordan, Robert. **A Crown of Swords: Book Seven of The Wheel of Time**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-55028-5, viii+880pp, A-format paperback, cover by Darrell K. Sweet, \$7.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; Jordan's books in this series have sold over five million copies, the accompanying publicity tells us.) *November 1997.*

Kerr, Katharine. **The Red Wyvern: Book One of the**

**Dragon Mage**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224142-0, 342pp, hardcover, cover by Geoff Taylor, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997; a new "Deverry" novel.) *17th November 1997.*

King, Stephen. **Wizard and Glass**. "The Dark Tower." Illustrated by Dave McKean. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-69661-3, xiv+672pp, C-format paperback, cover by Bob Warner, £14.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997; it's the fourth, and biggest, book in King's long-gestating "Dark Tower" sequence, following *The Gunslinger*, *The Drawing of the Three* and *The Wastelands*; the author states in an afterword that there are three more volumes to come.) *6th November 1997.*

Kurtz, Katherine, and Deborah Turner Harris. **Death of an Adept: A Novel of The Adept**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00484-9, 435pp, A-format paperback, cover by Joe Burleson, \$6.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; fifth in the "Adept" series; about the occult adventures of a British hero, Sir Adam Sinclair, Master of the Hunt, it has a Dennis Wheatley-ish air – though no doubt reworked through contemporary, feminine, American sensibilities, and shorn of Wheatley's snobbery and racism.) *November 1997.*

Lanza, Joseph. **Gravity: Tilted Perspectives on Rocketships, Rollercoasters, Earthquakes and Angel Food**. Quartet, ISBN 0-7043-8056-0, xxv+224pp, trade paperback, £10. (Illustrated meditations on the subjects the title promises, first published in the USA, 1997; how nice of Quartet Books [not a publisher we normally hear from] to send us this oddball item!; Lanza is previously the author of *Elevator Music: A Surreal History of Muzak, Easy-listening and Other*

*Moodsong* [1995], a work which was praised by J. G. Ballard and others; as for the present book, described in the blurb as a "fact-filled and vertiginous literary excursion ... mixing history and science with fevered subjectivity" which "relates some of gravity's most brilliant moments – the falls of Lucifer and Icarus, the push-up bra, the rise of skyscrapers, the heights and depths of eroticism, the threat of killer asteroids and the sinister course of ordinary household objects," well, it's sort of the *Fortean Times* for intellectuals – delightful stuff.) *23rd October 1997.*

LeFanu, Sarah, ed. **Sex, Drugs, Rock'n'Roll: Stories to End the Century**. Serpent's Tail, ISBN 1-85242-538-5, xiii+223pp, B-format paperback, £8.99. (Mainstream short-story anthology, first edition; the stories are mostly

original, and mostly deliver what the book's title promises; there is little fantasy here, but it is an interesting volume and the contributors include Steve Aylett, Joyce Carol Oates, Michele Roberts, Nicholas Royle, Lisa Tuttle and Cherry Wilder, among others; there is also a

story by one John Saul, who turns out not to be John Saul the well-known American horror novelist, but a Britisher of the same name: he should do something about his byline.) *20th October 1997.*

McCaffrey, Anne. **The Masterharper of Pern**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38823-2, 419pp, hardcover, \$25. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the latest "Dragonriders" book – the most successful planetary-romance series of our time, now that its main competition, Marion Zimmer Bradley's "Darkover" series, seems to have faded from view [in Britain].) *January 1998.*

Marley, Louise. **Receive the Gift**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00486-5, 297pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$5.99. (Science-fantasy novel, first

edition; sequel to *Sing the Wormth* and *Sing the Light*; cutesy sub-McCaffrey stuff in planetary-romance vein.) *November 1997.*

Matthews, Rodney. **Count-down to Millennium**. Text by Nigel Suckling. Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-394-X, 112pp, very large-format paperback, £13.99. (Fantasy art collection; first edition; many of the reproductions are from music-album covers, including a number Matthews has done in recent years for "Christian rock and thrash bands.") *16th October 1997.*

Modesitt, L. E., Jr. **The Spell-song War: Book Two of The Spell-song Cycle**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86492-2, 461pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; there are a good many fantasy toasters out there, but none of them seems to produce new books faster than Mr Modesitt.) *January 1998.*

Moore, Ward. **Bring the Jubilee**. Introduction by Jeff Shaara. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40502-1, xii+221pp, B-format paperback, \$11. (Alternative-history sf novel, first published in the USA, 1953; a classic, which it's good to see reissued in the wake of Harry Turtledove's novels on a similar South-won-the-Civil-War theme.) *1st October 1997.*

Newman, Sharan. **The Chessboard Queen**. "A story of Guinevere." Tor, ISBN 0-312-86391-8, 296pp, trade paperback, cover by Daniel MacLise, \$13.95. (Arthurian fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1983; second in the trilogy which began with *Guinevere* [1981] and concluded with *Guinevere Evermore* [1985].) *17th November 1997.*

Niven, Larry. **Destiny's Road**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-547-9, 438pp, hardcover, cover by Michael Whelan, £16.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1997; reviewed, from the American edition, by Neil Jones in *Interzone* 123.) *4th December 1997.*

Priest, Christopher. **The Prestige**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85886-8, 404pp, trade paperback, \$14.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1995; winner of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and the





World Fantasy Award; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 101.) 30th October 1997.

Robertson, R. Garcia y. **American Woman.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86146-X, 349pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Fantasy [?] western novel, first edition; proof copy received; this curious item, by the rising author of several sf/fantasy novels [his last was *Atlantis Found*, AvoNova, April 1997], is about "American history as it should have been: the amazing adventures of a blonde Quaker Indian wife at Custer's Last Stand"; the publishers compare it to Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man*.) February 1998.

Royle, Nicholas. **The Matter of the Heart.** Abacus, ISBN 0-349-10956-7, xii+305pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Literary horror novel, first edition; Royle's third novel, it carries cover commendations from Iain Sinclair and M. John Harrison; the title would appear to be an inversion of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* [1948].) 6th November 1997.

Russell, Jay. **Burning Bright.** Raven, ISBN 1-85487-467-5, 280pp, B-format paperback, £5.99. (Crime/horror novel, first edition; Russell's third novel, following *Celestial Dogs* and *Blood*.) 30th October 1997.

Russell, Mary Doria. **The Sparrow.** Fawcett Columbine, ISBN 0-449-91255-8, 408pp, B-format paperback, cover by Giotto, \$12. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; reviewed, glowingly, by Brian Stableford in *Interzone* 116; there seems little point any more in us puffing this debut novel by an American anthropologist, since it seems to be taking on a galloping life of its own: it won the Tiptree Award, and a film version starring Antonio Banderas is said to be in production; this edition, from Ballantine Books' snob-back division [not labelled "sf"], contains a six-page interview with the author in unnumbered pages at the back, together with "Reading Group Questions and Topics for Discussion"; evidently the publishers are hoping it will become a set text in schools and colleges!) 1st October 1997.

Russo, Richard Paul. **Carlucci's Heart.** "The new cyberthriller from the Philip K. Dick Award-winning author." Ace, ISBN 0-441-00485-7, 391pp, A-format paperback, cover by Victor Stabin, \$6.50. (Sf/crime novel, first edition; it seems to be a follow-up to an earlier novel, *Corlucci's Edge*, which we never saw; Russo, a talented American writer who has been praised by Ursula Le Guin and others, has not been well served by British publishers; his first two novels, *Inner Eclipse* and *Subterranean Gallery* [the Dick Award-winner], had UK editions [Grafton Books] but seemed to sink without trace; his third, *Destroying Angel*, came from Headline in 1992, but [to the best of our knowledge] there has been no sign of these "Carlucci" books from any British publisher.) November 1997.

Saberhagen, Fred. **The Face of Apollo: The First Book of the Gods.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86408-6, 382pp, trade paperback, \$13.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) January 1998.

Sheffield, Charles. **The Cyborg from Earth: A Jupiter Novel.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86407-8, 285pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Young-adult sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; this is the fourth in a commendable series of Heinlein-esque hard-sf "juveniles.") March 1998.

Steele, Allen. **All-American Alien Boy: The United States as Science Fiction, Science Fiction as a Journey; A Collection.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00460-1, xviii+267pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton [the painting which previously appeared on the cover of *Interzone* 101], \$5.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1996; 11 stories, reprinted from *Analog*, *Asimov's*, *F&SF*, *Science Fiction Age* and elsewhere; there's also a six-page introduction by the author and lengthy intros to each story.) October 1997.

Stewart, Sean. **The Night Watch.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00445-8, 325pp, hardcover, cover by Tara McGovern-Benson, \$21.95. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition; it's set in the same future world [where magic works] as the author's

earlier novel *Resurrection Mon* [1995; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 100]; Sean Stewart [born in the USA in 1965] resided in Canada for some years and has hitherto been regarded as a Canadian author, though we are told he is now living in Houston, Texas.) 1st November 1997.

Stine, R. L. **Ghost Camp.** "Goosebumps, 45." Scholastic/Hippo, ISBN 0-590-19566-2, 119pp, B-format paperback, £3.99. (Juvenile horror novel, first published in the USA, 1996; it is copyright "Parachute Press, Inc.") October 1997.

Stine, R. L. **Goosebumps Flashing Special: Chicken, Chicken, Don't Go to Sleep!, The Blob That Ate Everyone.** Scholastic/Hippo, ISBN 0-590-19730-4, 353pp, hardcover, £8.99. (Juvenile horror omnibus, first edition; the three novels were originally published separately in the USA, all in 1997; they are copyright "Parachute Press, Inc."; it's called a "flashing special" because there's a skull on the front cover and if you press its mouth its eyes flash red.) October 1997.

Stine, R. L. **Goosebumps TV Special 4: Night of the Living Dummy 2, Say Cheese and Die!** "2 *Goosebumps* books as seen on BBC TV." Scholastic/Hippo, ISBN 0-590-19867-X, 260pp, B-format paperback, £4.99. (Juvenile horror omnibus, first edition; the novels were originally published separately in the USA, in 1995 and 1992; both are copyright "Parachute Press, Inc."; evidently this ties in to a puppet TV series, although the books are not novelizations.) October 1997.

Tarr, Judith. **Avaryan Rising: The Hall of the Mountain King, The Lady of Hangeil, A Fall of Princes.** Tor/Orb, ISBN 0-312-86388-8, 851pp, trade paperback, \$19.95. (Fantasy omnibus, first edition; the three novels were first published separately in the USA, in 1986, 1987 and 1988.) 13th November 1997.

Tepper, Sheri S. **The Family Tree.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224668-6, 377pp, C-format paperback, cover by Michael Mascaro, £11.50. (Sf/fantasy novel; first published in the USA, 1997.) 1st December 1997.

Tolkien, J. R. R. **The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring, The Two Towers, The Return of the King.** 3 vols. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-261-10357-1, 10358-X and 10359-8, xvi+x+xxi+1137pp, B-format paperbacks, covers by the author, £7.99 per volume. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1954-55; this is yet another nitpickingly revised and improved edition, with redrawn maps and a four-page "Note on the Text" by Douglas A. Anderson [dated 1993]; the latter begins by pointing out what needs to be pointed out repeatedly: "The Lord of the Rings is often erroneously called a trilogy, when it is in fact a single novel"; the publishers have also sent us a boxed set which contains these three volumes plus a uniform reprinting of *The Hobbit* [1937], ISBN 0-261-10356-3, the whole priced at £24.99.) 3rd November 1997.

Turtledove, Harry. **Between the Rivers.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86202-4, 381pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; it seems to be set in a culture that resembles ancient Mesopotamia, and is described by the publishers as "a fantasy novel about the beginnings of humanity"; the notion that the human race "began" 5,000 or even 10,000 years ago in the Middle East – even if it's meant to be taken in a metaphorical sense – seems quaintly old-fashioned after all we've learned in recent decades about African origins, Mitochondrial Eve, etc; in fact, when is somebody going to try to write the great Out-of-Africa novel?) March 1998.

Turtledove, Harry. **How Few Remain.** "A Novel of the Second War Between the States." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-41661-9, 474pp, hardcover, \$25. (Alternative-history sf novel, first edition; about a second American Civil War, 20 years after the first one, it features historical characters such as the young Teddy Roosevelt and Samuel L. Clemens [Mark Twain]; this big book, which no doubt will do well in the author's home country, is probably destined to remain as unknown, and as opaque, to most non-U.S. readers as Turtledove's previous novel in

the same vein, *The Guns of the South*.) 1st October 1997.

Wilhelm, Kate. **The Good Children.** St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-17914-6, 246pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Horror [?] novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's about four kids in a big old house in Oregon; in an accompanying publicity letter editor Gordon Van Gelder compares it to Jack Cady's *The Off Season*.) Morch 1998.

Willis, Donald C. **Horror and Science Fiction Films IV.** Scarecrow Press [distributed in Britain by Shelwing Ltd, 4 Pleydell Gdns., Folke-

stone, Kent CT20 2DN], ISBN 0-8108-3055-8, xviii+642pp, hardcover, £85.05. (A-Z of horror and sf films; first published in the USA, 1997; this is the American edition with a British price added; apparently the fourth of a series [though we're given no information on the first three volumes], this is a big book – its double-columned, unillustrated pages list thousands of movies, with credits and plot details; the emphasis seems to be on the obscure [e.g. the Filipino *Batman Fights Dracula*, mentioned in the introduction]; recommended to those whose bud-

gets will stretch and who have an insatiable thirst for such out-of-the-way movie information.) 18th December 1997.

Wilson, Martin. **The Castle of Oblivion.** Christoffel Press [44 Elm Rd., Wisbech, Cambs. PE13 2TB], ISBN 0-9527723-2-9, 140pp, small-press paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; probably a debut novel by a new British writer, it's advertised as the first of a trilogy.) 1st November 1997.

Wurts, Janny. **Fugitive Prince: The Wars of Light and Shadows, Volume 4: First Book of The Alliance**

**of Light.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224076-9, 565pp, hardcover, cover by Don Maitz, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1997.) 17th November 1997.

Zindell, David. **War in Heaven.** Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-28967-5, 645pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received; this hefty item is presumably "Book Three of A Requiem for Homo Sapiens," although the proof does not state as much; a hardcover edition is no doubt forthcoming in the UK from HarperCollins/Voyager.) 12th January 1998.

Bucher-Jones, Simon. **Ghost Devices.** "The New Adventures." Virgin, ISBN 0-426-20514-6, 249pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Salwowski, £4.99. (Shared-universe sf novel, featuring the galactic adventures of Bernice Summerfield [a former associate of Doctor Who]; first edition.) 20th November 1997.

Chizmar, Richard, ed. **Scream-plays.** Introduction by Dean Koontz. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-39429-1, xi+545pp, trade paperback, cover by Dave McKean, \$14.50. (Collection of horror screenplays and teleplays, most of them based on pre-existing novels or short stories by the authors in question; first edition; Martin Greenberg is "invisible" co-editor; the authors are Harlan Ellison, Ed Gorman, Stephen King, Joe R. Lansdale, Richard Laymon and Richard Matheson; a nice idea, but unfortunately the book is marred by the fact that it contains no editorial apparatus – no introductions to the scripts, no dates of original production or transmission with cast lists, no credits of any kind [everything is copyrighted "1997"]; so, have all these screenplays been produced or not?; we may never know.) Late entry: 11th September publication, received in October 1997.

Dicks, Terrance. **Mean Streets.** "The New Adventures." Virgin, ISBN 0-426-20519-7, 248pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £4.99. (Shared-universe sf novel, featuring the galactic adventures of Bernice Summerfield [a former associate of

## Spinoffery

*This is a list of all books received that fall into those sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror which may be termed novelizations, recursive fictions, spinoffs, sequels by other hands, shored worlds and sharecrops (including non-fiction about shared worlds, films and TV, etc.). The collective term "Spinoffery" is used for the sake of brevity.*

Doctor Who]; first edition.) 4th December 1997.

Friedman, Michael Jan. **Day of Honor: The Television Episode.** "Star Trek: Voyager." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-01981-3, 247pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series novelization, first published in the USA, 1997; it's based on a script by Jeri Taylor; this is the American first edition with a British price added.) November 1997.

Garland, Mark. **Trial by Error.** "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, #21." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-00251-1, 281pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1997; this is the American first edition with a British price added.) November 1997.

Howarth, Chris, and Steve Lyons. **The Completely Useless Unauthorised Star Trek Encyclopedia.** Virgin, ISBN 0-7535-0198-8, x+241pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff trivia book, first edition; it has alphabetically arranged entries, interspersed with various lists such as "Ten Great Ways to Cash in on the Star Trek Franchise"; on the back cover the book is blurred as "shameless exploitation of a revered science fiction cash cow.") 6th November 1997.

Howe, David J., and Stephen James Walker. **Doctor Who:**

**The Handbook: The Second Doctor.** Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20516-2, vi+307pp, A-format paperback, cover by Alister Pearson, £5.99. (Companion to the Doctor Who BBC television series which starred Patrick Troughton [1966-1969]; first edition.) 20th November 1997.

Jones, Stephen. **Clive Barker's A-Z of Horror.** Introduction by Clive Barker. BBC Books, ISBN 0-563-37152-8, 256pp, trade paperback, £12.99. (Illustrated companion to the recent TV series about horror fiction and film hosted by Barker; first edition; it's organized on alphabetical lines [from "A for American Psycho" to "Z for Zombie"], with many colour and black-and-white illustrations [some of them drawings by Barker]; recommended as a gruesome gift-book for some horror lover's Christmas.) No date shown: received in October 1997.

Lee, Christopher. **Tall, Dark and Gruesome.** "An Autobiography." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06497-8, 320pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Reminiscences of the actor who played Count Dracula, Frankenstein's monster, etc. in many British horror movies; first edition [?] – it's copyright "1977, 1997" which suggests there was a version 20 years ago; Lee is probably the cinema's greatest icon of horror since Boris Karloff.) 31st October 1997.

Lumley, Brian. **Titus Crow, Volume Three: In the Moons of Borea, Elysia: The Coming of Cthulhu.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86365-9, 380pp, hardcover, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$24.95. (Horror omnibus, first edition; the two novels first appeared separately in the USA in 1979 and 1989; these are a couple of the same tales as have been re-published recently in Britain by HarperCollins in two paperback volumes as *Brian Lumley's Mythos Omnibus*; the series has been appearing as three slimmer books in America, of which this is the last; the novels are pastiche Lovecraftiana, belonging to the shared "Cthulhu Mythos" orchestrated after Lovecraft's death by August Derleth.) 31st October 1997.

Sargent, Pamela, and George Zebrowski. **Heart of the Sun.** "Star Trek, #83." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-00237-6, 245pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1997; this is the American first edition with a British price added.) November 1997.

Schweighofer, Peter, ed. **Tales from the Empire.** "Star Wars." Bantam, ISBN 0-553-50686-2, xxvi+324pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf movie-series spinoff anthology, first published in the USA, 1997; contributors include Michael A. Stackpole, Kathy Tyers, Timothy Zahn and several unknowns recruited from the pages of the *Official Star Wars Adventure Journal*, of which Peter Schweighofer is the editor.) 11th November 1997.



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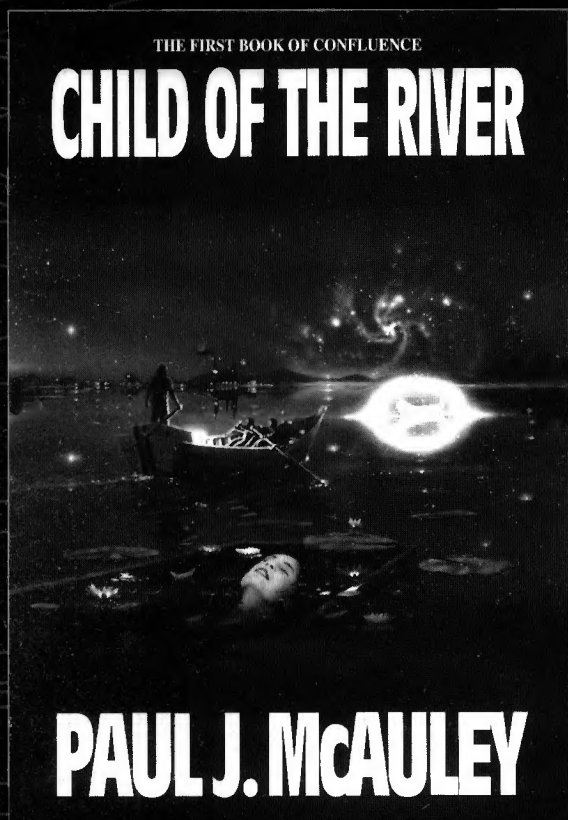


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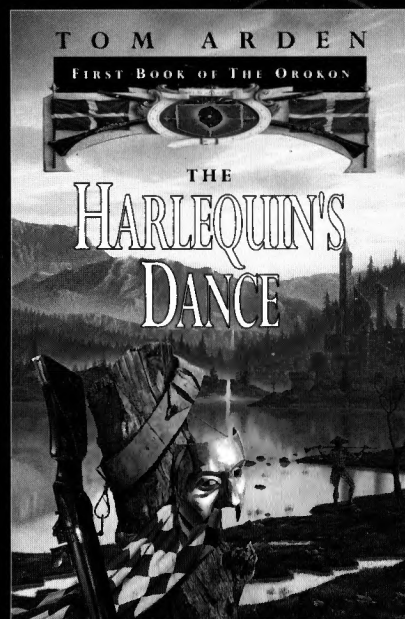
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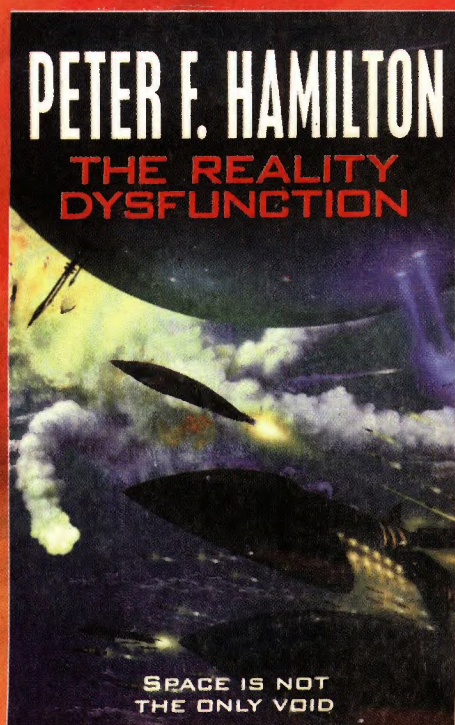


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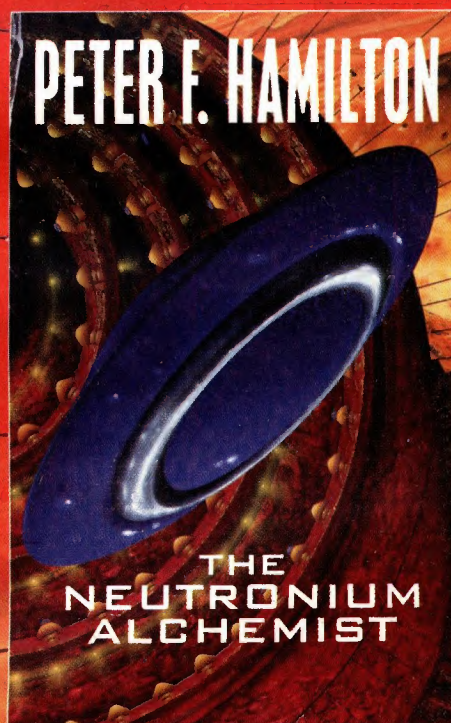
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